

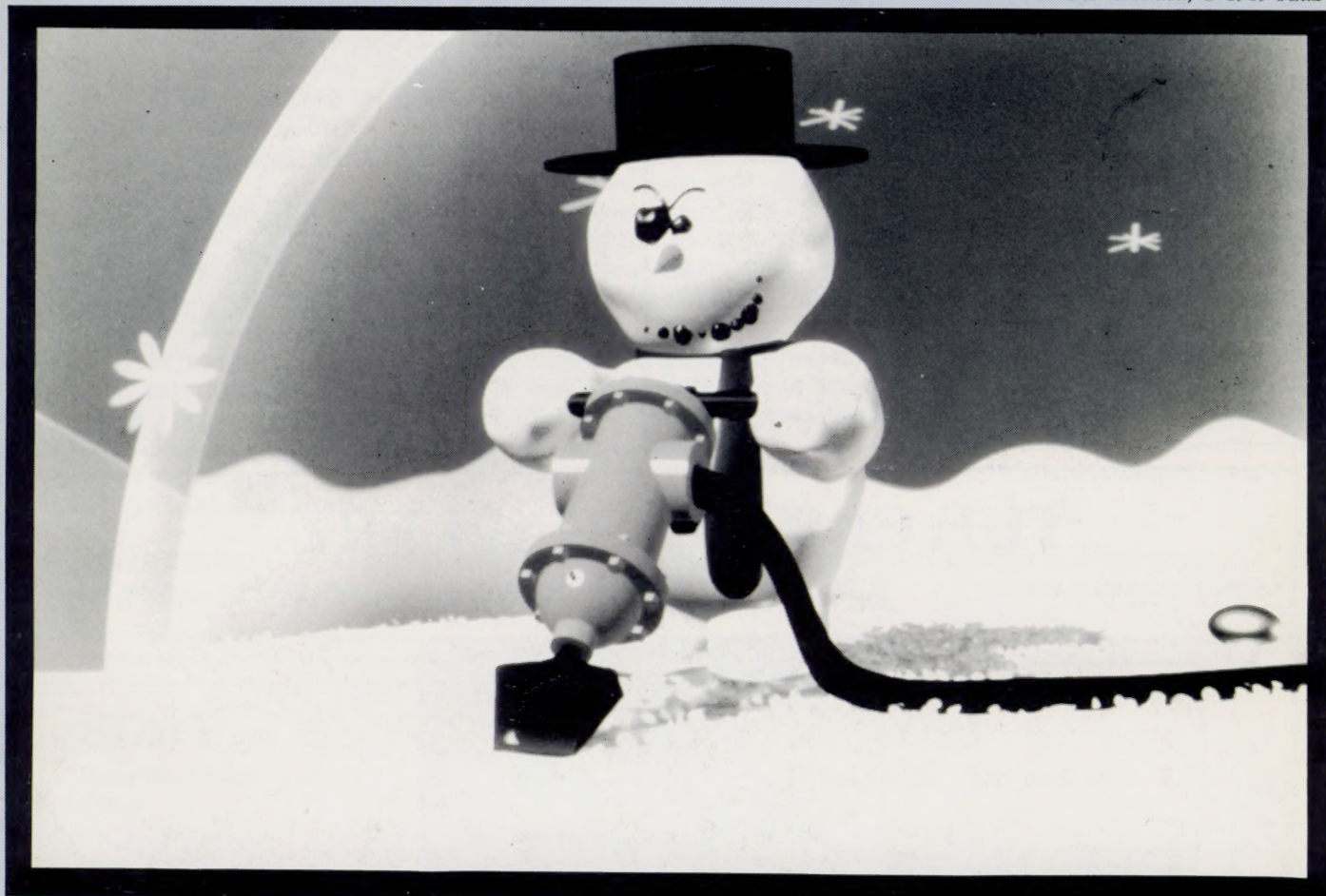
NUMBER NINETEEN

THE ANIMATION FAN'S MAGAZINE

TWO DOLLARS

ANIMATO!

From *Knickknack*, © 1989 Pixar



THE WIZARD OF PIXAR

JOHN LASSETER ON *TIN TOY*, *KNICKKNACK*, AND THE
WORLD OF COMPUTER ANIMATION

ALSO: DISNEY'S FLORIDA STUDIO • WARNER GREAT VIRGIL ROSS
NEWS, REVIEWS, AND MORE

DISCOVER ANIMATO'S SECRET PAST.

Okay, maybe that's a little melodramatic, but our back issues are definitely something worth discovering. We've been publishing the magazine for more than six years, and classic *Animato* issues offer a wealth of coverage of 80s animation, historical articles, informative reviews, rare illustrations, and other great features.

Parts of our past will have to remain secret: issues #1-8, #9, #11, #13, and #15 are out of print. The following issues, however, are still available, at \$2.50 each, or any five for \$10.00 – you save \$2.50. **Many of the remaining issues are in short supply**, so get 'em while they last (and list alternates if possible). Here's a look at some of the highlights of these jam-packed magazines:

#10: Dave Bennett's cover announces a special book review section, with pieces on Leonard Mosley's *Disney's World*, Shamus Culhane's *Talking Animals* and

Other People, and Joe Adamson's *The Walter Lantz Story*; Steve Segal begins his first-hand account of the making of *The Brave Little Toaster*; and Mark Marderosian on *Goliath II*.

#12: Timothy Fay presides over Saturday Mourning '86; Harry McCracken on *An American Tail* and Don Bluth's other work; Mike Dobbs on Max Fleischer's live-action work; Jim Korkis's *Harlequin* and David Bastian's *Flipbooks* columns debut; all topped off by a Dave Bennett cover.

#14: We mark the year of *Snow White* with Mike Ventrella's review of the film; Gary Meyer on Norman McLaren; TV's *Ewoks* and *Droids*; plus Shamus Culhane and a look at the future of computer animation.

#16: Our last digest-sized issue is a special *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures* one, with a John Kricfalusi in-

terview and RoundTable discussion of the show featuring comments by Chuck Jones, Leonard Maltin, and others. Plus McCracken on the Museum of Cartoon Art's Fleischer Studios exhibit, and more. Original cover by Kricfalusi.

#17: Our first magazine-sized issue features an exclusive Ralph Bakshi interview and preview of *Tattertown*; a look at the world of Chinese animation; an interview with Jack Hannah by Jim Korkis; and a long review of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

#18: Friz Freleng, in a rare interview, talks about his career from Kansas City in the 1920s to the Pink Panther; *Oliver & Company*'s George Scribner takes us behind the scenes of the Disney hit; Tim Fay on Saturday morning 1988-1989; plus columns, news, film poll, and more in our biggest issue ever.

Subscriptions to future issues are also available, of course: \$10.00 (\$15.00 in U.S. funds outside North America) gets you the next four issues hot off the presses, before they reach stores.

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ANIMATORIAL

Pretentious but true: this is *Animato's* first issue of the 1990s. As such, it seems a good time to remember some of the notable events in the world of animation during the 1980s:

- The Don Bluth Studios released its first film, *The Secret of NIMH*; created three laserdisc videogames; almost went bankrupt; and rose from the ashes as Sullivan-Bluth to produce two of the most successful animated features of all time;
- Japanese animation acquired more and more fans in the U.S.;
- The Walt Disney Studios released *The Fox and the Hound*, *Mickey's Christmas Carol*, *The Black Cauldron*, *The*

Great Mouse Detective, *Oliver & Company*, and *The Little Mermaid*; underwent one of the most widely-publicized management changes in corporate history; entered the TV animation market; and began releasing a new animated film each year;

- We lost many important people: Tex Avery, Mel Blanc, Daws Butler, Bob Clampett, Paul Frees, Hugh Harman, Ken Harris, Milt Kahl, Eric Larson, Abe Levitow, Mike Maltese, Jack Mercer, Otto Messmer, Woolie Reitherman, Osamu Tezuka, and Jay Ward, among others;
- Laserdisc videogames were invented, promoted as a fantastic new medium for animation, then disappeared;
- George Lucas produced an animated film, *Twice Upon a Time*, which was barely released; Steven Spielberg followed suit with *An American Tail*

and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, with considerably more success;

- TV animation moved more and more of its production overseas; saw DePatie-Freleng and Filmation cease operations; and let the merchandising tail wag the dog;
- Animated features other than those mentioned above included *The Adventures of Mark Twain*, *Animalympics*, *Babar: the Movie*, *Bhe Brave Little Toaster*, *Daffy Duck's Quackbusters*, *Felix the Cat*, *Fire and Ice*, *Heavy Metal*, *Heidi's Song*, *Pinocchio and the Emperor of the Night*, *The Plague Dogs*, *Rock & Rule*, *Star-chaser*, and more Care Bears films than I care to think about.

It was a busy ten years. Here's hoping the 1990s prove at least as interesting.

Harry McCracken

Logo by Matt Towler



ANIMATO WORSHIPPING FALSE IDOLS?

Donald Alan Webster
Hapeville, GA

There is one thing I have never really understood, and that is how two people can look at the same work and one see a masterpiece and the other trash. Yet I have seen this happen so often that I have ceased to be angry and am merely perplexed.

Did Mike Ventrella see the same *The Man Who Planted Trees* that I did? If so, how could he not have been "overly impressed" with it? This film is a mas-

terpiece; it looks like a Van Gogh painting come to life. To condemn it for not doing justice to the beauty of trees (I doubt that it intended to) would be to condemn every painting of a tree by every artist who ever lived.

But now I must go on to my main point, which is the comparative worth of *The Land Before Time* and *Oliver & Company*. You published a one-page, mostly-negative review of *Land*, and a six-page interview plus a mostly-positive review of *Oliver*. You seem to be pushing the Disney film and downgrading the Bluth one. Now, the Disney

film, while it has some good things in it, is clearly not up to the classic Disney standard, or even up to *The Great Mouse Detective*. The backgrounds have a crude, unfinished look to them. The songs are so contemporary that the film will be dated in ten years. Also, the film is full of cute in-joke allusions to past Disney films (Fagin's Mickey Mouse watch, Tito singing "Heigh-Ho," etc).

Now on the other hand, the Don Bluth film was exactly what an animated film should be but rarely is. It seems that Bluth imitates Disney better than Disney does. At least your readers seem to agree with me: in your *Animato* Film Poll, *Land* made it to #41 while *Oliver* didn't make the list at all.

Steve Vanden-Eykel
New Westminster, British Columbia

Whoever did that review of *The Land Before Time* [Bob Miller] is a bit of a hardcase. I agree with most of his opinions, but there was no need to be so insulting just because Disney was one of the cover stories. That caricature of Littlefoot was uncalled for, and in extremely bad taste. I know *Land Before Time* wasn't a great movie, certainly not Bluth's best, but *Oliver & Company*

wasn't much better (although I admit it had great villains).

When I see your magazine extolling the Disney movie and degrading the Bluth one, I have to wonder at your objectivity, and whether you're just worshipping at the feet of the Disney god. [Any impression that Animato has an official stance on the relative merits of Disney and Bluth animation – or anything else, for that matter – is mistaken. The magazine is made up of far

too diverse and opinionated a group of writers and artists to toe a party line. Bob Miller submitted a review of *The Land Before Time*; we ran it because it was a well-written statement of his response to the film, not because of the opinions it expressed. If you look back at our coverage of Disney films over the years, you will find that some of it is positive and some is negative. The same thing applies to the pieces we've run regarding Don Bluth's work.]

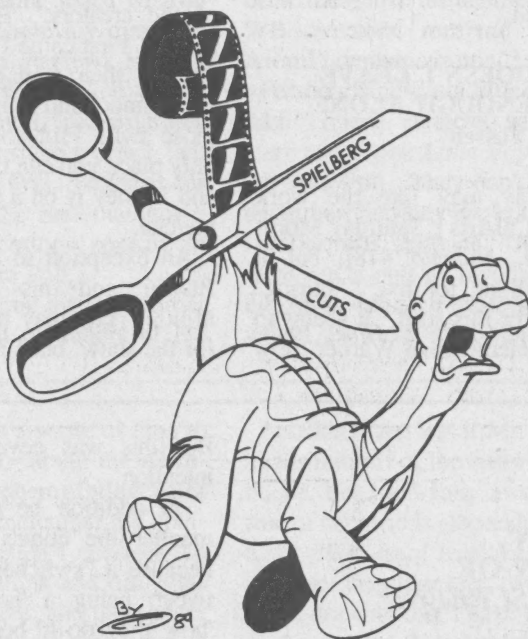
UCLA VAULT MANAGER: SUPERMAN'S SAFE AND SOUND

Jere Guldin

**Vault Manager, UCLA Film and
Television Archive
Los Angeles, CA**

One negative aspect to an otherwise excellent issue (#18). In the "Koko Comments" feature (always enjoyable, by the way), G. Michael Dobbs states that the negatives to the Superman

Illustration by Charles Tennaro



DINOSAURS ON THE CUTTING-ROOM FLOOR: BLUTH'S LAND VS. SPIELBERG'S LAND

**Christopher Tennaro
Seffner, FL**

Last November, the moviegoing public could delight in viewing two fully-animated feature films. Yes, animation has made a comeback, but there is still a major question looming on the horizon. Can animated films overcome the creative and financial problems that have for so long strangled television animation?

At last, it seems, animators are able to create big budget films, without the restraints of censors, special interest groups, and other compromisers of the artist's visions...or can they?

I was quite disturbed when I read, in a variety of articles, about the extensive editing Steven Spielberg deemed necessary on his own production, *The Land Before Time*. For those who haven't heard, almost ten minutes of finished animation was given the ax, along with

changes in the dialogue made to tone down scenes considered too disturbing for young children.

Spielberg believed some of the scenes in the Don Bluth film were too violent, and if left intact could possibly lead to psychological damage in young viewers. His own recollections of being terrorized by scenes of "utter violence" in early Disney classics as a youth reportedly prompted his actions.

I suppose one could find Spielberg's concerns admirable. But if he was really concerned about negative influences on young children, whatever persuaded him to proceed *Land* with the *Family Dog* short, which he also produced? What are the values in a short in which a dog was repeatedly abused, both mentally and physically, by every member of the family? What message would a youngster receive when the dog gets his revenge by urinating on the living room

carpet?

Whether or not films have influence on child behavior has been an ongoing debate that will surely continue without resolution. Though one could find psychologists who would insist that violent animation can lead to violent behavior, others suggest that trauma in such films is a healthy way for children to overcome their fears.

Spielberg's actions seem especially ironic in this day and age, when producers and directors are joining together in recognition of the disservice done to films of the past. Such films as *Frankenstein* and *Lawrence of Arabia* have been restored to reflect the filmmakers' original visions. Both, of course, had fallen victim to thoughtless acts of barbarism.

I wonder how Spielberg would react if a powerful producer had edited scenes from his film *Jaws* on grounds that some scenes might be inappropriate for the younger audience? With its PG rating, it was more than likely the first Summer blockbuster of the seventies, viewed by children of all ages.

Point being, would *The Land Before Time* have been a better film with the missing scenes restored? Perhaps not, but at least it would have been a complete film.

Keeping the scenes would have also been more cost-effective, since it was money already spent. Plus, the hard work of animators and other artists involved with the film would have not gone in vain. If nothing else, we animation fans could have been treated to additional moments of rare classical animation. Instead, Spielberg elected to waste millions on footage that ended up on the editing room floor. Perhaps a special, longer version could be released for the home video market some day.

In short, this writer believes in letting filmmakers like Don Bluth challenge the audience with their creative visions, and let the box office speak for itself!

cartoons are held by UCLA, and that "someone on the west coast got access to these negatives and transferred them to video." This implies that they were improperly used while in the possession of the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

This could not have happened. Since being deposited with the Archive by Warner Bros. in 1986, the 35mm picture negatives have never left the Archive's storage vaults for any reason whatsoever. The picture materials the Archive holds are original nitrate successive exposure negatives. Because the negatives are printed with *three* successive black-and-white frames (the separate yellow, cyan, and magenta images of the old Technicolor process) for every *single* frame of final composite print, it would be impossible for any color video transfer to be made directly from these materials.

Indeed, it is more likely that someone duped the new 35mm prints that have been in circulation during the past few

years, or the color internegatives from which they had been struck. None of these have ever been in the Archive's possession.

The UCLA Film and Television Archive is a treasure trove of film animation, with an ongoing commitment to preservation. Serious researchers can make appointments to screen its viewing copies, many of them rare nitrate prints. But access to its holdings are severely restricted, and security is rigid. An implication such as the one in Dobbs's column is unfortunate, unjust, and misinformed.

SatAM DOESN'T LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE

Deborah Van Fossen
Brookville, FL

Timothy Fay may like the work coming out of CalArts ["Saturday Morning 1988-1989, *Animato* #18], but it doesn't do anything for me. "Jarring" isn't the word for this stuff. It seems to mix the worst elements of Warner (how

many ways can you bash a cat in fifteen minutes - ha ha) with a misplaced pinch of off-the-wall Bakshi, and as far as I'm concerned it just doesn't work.

Of course, I find most reworkings of established characters such as Scooby-Doo (who wasn't much of a character to begin with) and the Real Ghostbusters irritating in the first place. Many programs suffer from the dreaded "Hanna-Barbera" syndrome, continually adding new and unnecessary characters and incarnations of characters to cover what I consider a lack of creativity on the part of the creators. Example: *The Flintstones*. First came Pebbles; then Bamm-Bamm; then teenage Flintstones; then the Shmoo and Captain Caveman and those awful Flintstone kids. Today, the only place you can find the original Fred and Barney is on a noxious cereal commercial.

An exception to this rule was Ralph Bakshi and his born-again *Mighty Mouse*. Fay may not have cared much for the show, but I found it refreshing in

SHAMUS CULHANE ON DAVID BASTIAN'S REVIEW OF *ANIMATION FROM SCRIPT TO SCREEN*: A REBUTTAL

David Bastian's review last issue of Shamus Culhane's instructional book on animation, Animation From Script to Screen, prompted this response from the author, who has also written Talking Animals and Other People, an autobiography.

Shamus Culhane
New York, NY

My first reaction to Mr. Bastian's criticism of my book was one of grief, because this avalanche of fault-finding, given with such assurance, is probably going to stop many prospective students from buying this book and the rest of my curriculum. My next feeling was intense anger, coupled with a determination to give him the lambasting he so richly deserves.

He describes me as an old uncle who puts forth instructions that are not always understood. Maybe he can't understand them, but I have at least a dozen book reviews that write about my

ability to explain technical subjects with great clarity, even if the reader is not in the profession.

Next Mr. Bastian complains that the title is misleading. But if the reader mistakenly assumes that all the secrets of production are locked up in this one volume, those hopes are speedily dashed. I quote from page two, "There is no way I could encapsulate, in a single book, all the many facets of learning that must be examined and understood to create a meaningful animated film." This is immediately followed by a list of the books that make up the curriculum.

Now Mr. Bastian either skimmed this page or chose to ignore the caveat, because from this point on most of his negative criticism is based on the idea that this book is a complete entity. This unpardonably careless error makes for a rich opportunity to find a number of imaginary faults. Read by itself, he is quite right that the book would be only partially useful to most professionals.

But this was never at any time my intention.

In addition he calls my discursive manner the book's greatest weakness, because it "switches back and forth between being a 'how to' book and a 'how they do it' book." I studied with Don Graham at Disney's art class, and later at Chouinard's, for a total of seven years. When he talked to the group he was always discursive. I don't know of a better way to teach than to pose a problem, then talk about the way it was solved by different artists. Perhaps in some distant time Mr. Bastian will suggest a better way.

That I deal with the psychological aspects of the relationship between the director and his staff for "three chapters" is a blatant exaggeration in order to make his point. The truth is that this material takes just a page and a half. Most of the following text I believe to be especially important, because it consists of many observations that don't appear in any other animation textbook to my knowledge.

But Mr. Bastian seems to find it boring to learn how to properly conduct a recording, how to listen to a soundtrack, how to create sound effects, how to rehearse actors, etc. If he really finds all this boring, I am led to believe he has little or no experience as a professional filmmaker.

its willingness to lampoon its own industry and its attempt to elevate SatAM humor above simple cat-bashing antics. The show had its problems, but at least Bakshi tried. I'm going to miss his *Mighty Mouse*.

FRELENG NOT UNDERAPPRECIATED

John Beam

East Lansing, MI

I enjoyed reading the interview with Friz Freleng and the rest of the Warner Bros. information in your Spring 1989 issue. There is one thing that I wish to get off my chest, though: my disagreement with the notion that Friz Freleng has been somehow overlooked by us animation fans. That is preposterous. Perhaps Harry McCracken's belief that we "tend to take Friz Freleng for granted" is due to the fact that not a single Friz Freleng cartoon appears in the latest *Animato* Film Poll.

I don't believe that true fans of Warner Bros. animation need reminders of the

accomplishments of Friz Freleng any more than they do those of Tex Avery, Bob Clampett, Frank Tashlin, and Chuck Jones. If I or anyone else tend to favor one director's cartoons over another's, I can't see that as oversight. The Motion Picture Academy certainly hasn't ignored Freleng, making him the most-nominated director at Warner Bros. (twelve times, with four winners). Chuck Jones's cartoons, which on the whole I feel are superior, were nominated only seven times with one Oscar winner. Bob Clampett, who may have been the most influential of the great WB directors, received no Academy Award nominations at all!

Personally, I was a little surprised that such Freleng cartoons as *Hare Meets Herr* and *Three Little Bops* didn't make the Film Poll. They don't make my top ten either, but they are in my top fifteen favorite WB cartoons. Maybe if *Animato* ran a poll of favorite cartoons on the basis of each cartoon studio, you would see much more that Friz Freleng

is not at all taken for granted by the cartoon viewing audience.

ANIMATOR LIKES ANIMATO

Gian Celestri

Pawtucket, RI

I just saw issue #18, which is the first copy of *Animato* I've ever seen (I don't frequent comic-book stores much). All in all, this is quite a nice magazine you've got, and I wish you success. I found it gratifying that two of the films I worked on during my tenure at Nelvana are listed on your film poll: *Rock & Rule* (I animated the fat policeman "Quadhole," "Mylar" the club owner, and "Cindy" the fat giantess on rollerskates); and *A Cosmic Christmas* (I animated the grandmother, the parents, and the spacemen).

Well, as Frank Thomas once said: "Once it's on the screen, it's there forever!"

[The little-seen *Rock & Rule* also had the distinction of being *Animato's* very first cover story, back in 1983.]

I don't agree that it's a waste of time to warn the novice writer about the Alice-in-Wonderland atmosphere of agencies and the networks. I remember my complete bewilderment when I encountered their massive group-think and decisions motivated solely by fear, and their anger when I, the producer, did not want to join in the fear syndrome. My impression is that Mr. Bastian has had little or no experience in this climate, or he would not have brushed off my advice as unnecessary.

Mr. Bastian dismisses both Nicolaidese's *The Natural Way to Draw* and Betty Edwards's *Drawing With the Right Side of the Brain*, almost as if they were a part of the lunatic fringe. I am willing to wager that he has never read either book, much less tried out any of the exercises, because if he had he would have seen an improvement in his drawing right away.

I begged a page from Ms. Edwards's book, because it shows incredible improvement from painful scribbles to fine drawing in a span of a few months. Then there is my experience at Disney's, when I had a meteoric rise from assistant to Pluto specialist in one picture. I had used the principles of the "right side" theory unwittingly, combined with the facility learned by studying Nicolaidese. I wrote about this at length in *Talking Animals*.

I couldn't care less if Mr. Bastian never avails himself of the knowledge in these books, but I am fully aware that in his role of critic he is also seducing students to do likewise. It makes me furious, because they are the two best books about drawing that I have ever read.

As I read between the lines, Mr. Bastian seems to be disappointed that I have not produced a book like the average textbook, i.e., a depersonalized one with a compendium of "facts" predigested for the reader and lined up in neat rows like pickle jars on a store shelf. With all personal feelings hidden or excised.

It seems to alarm him that I am a passionate human being, with strong likes and dislikes, topped by an enormous love of the artform, which I wish to implant in my students. I think that the manner in which I write is pretty much the way I speak in a one-on-one situation.

He believes that my feisty manner and gruffness will repel the student and cause me to alienate the reader. I've been teaching since about 1937, and I have yet to have a student tell me that my manner is offensive. So I think Mr. Bastian's concern must rest solely within himself. He would have a hell of a time learning from Bill Roberts, whose acid remarks make me look like a pussycat; or Ben Sharpsteen, who believed that suffering is a necessary part

of creating. How about Walt himself, who would be concerned with your talent one moment, then dismiss you without a qualm the next? These are not suitable teachers for skin skins like Mr. Bastian.

That he is highly critical of my personality is understandable. Where I seek change and adventure at eighty, he seems to be looking for "order." Where I am always looking for psychological principles in my relationships, the process seems to disturb him mightily. Where I enjoy the almost sexual pleasure of drawing with the right side of my brain, he probably is looking for a way to created with complete objectivity, so he is in control.

Though he ends his article with some fulsome praise, the harm has been done. By that time he must have lost half of his readers. Who would want to read about a book with all those flaws, let alone go out and buy it?

Finally, in a review of a book of Len Lye's writings, he notes that I share many of his views, but makes no mention of this fact in his critique of my book. A more skilled writer would have used this in a neat segue from my book to Lye's. I hope my rage about his cavalier treatment of my book is apparent. To me, giving David Bastian a chance to review a book which was two years in the making is like giving a baby a thousand-dollar watch and a hammer.

PRAXINOSCOPE

The World of Animation

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Chuck Amuck: the Life and Times of an Animated Cartoonist (FS&G, \$24.95) is Chuck Jones's long-awaited autobiography, with the story of his life before, during, and after the Warner Bros. years profusely illustrated with black-and-white illustrations.

The Art of Hanna-Barbera (Viking, \$50), by Ted Sennett, is a coffee table-sized attempt to do for the kings of TV animation what *The Art of Walt Disney* did for the king of theatrical animation.

Disney Movie Book No. 1: Roger Rabbit in "Tummy Trouble" (WD Publications, Inc., \$7.95) is a graphic album-format adaptation of the Roger Rabbit short illustrated with color stills from the cartoon, and accompanied by interviews with some of the people who worked on it.

Get Animated! Review #1 is a magazing containing reviews of animated films, television programs, books, and other things of interest to animation fans (including one of *Animato*). Edited by John Cawley. \$5 postpaid from Get Animated!, PO Box 1458, Burbank, CA 91507.

The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings (Knopf, \$75) is a history of the medium from the silent days to today, by *Los Angeles Times* writer Charles Solomon, presented in a format that goes head-to-head with *The Art of Hanna-Barbera* in physical bulk and lavish use of color.

The Whole Toon Catalog is a fifty-eight page mail-order catalogue, featuring hundreds of animation videotapes, hard-to-find books, and cartoon-related toys and posters. Available from Whole Toon Access, 4739 University Way NE, Suite 1604, Seattle, WA 98105, (206) 391-8747.



Cartoon by Mark Marderosian

ANIMATION ONLINE: THE BIX ANIMATION CONFERENCE

Fans interested in discussing animation with others from around the U.S. and the world now have a meeting place where they can do so without ever leaving their homes: the Animation Conference, a new feature of BIX (BYTE Information Exchange), a service of McGraw-Hill. The conference, which opened in October, is accessed by personal computer and modem, and allows fans to read and leave public messages on animation in a special area reserved for the topic.

Co-moderated by *Animato* editor Harry McCracken with Emru Townsend, Jim Omura, and Jennifer Jumper, the Animation Conference has areas to discuss several aspects of animation, including new and upcoming works, computer animation, Japanese animation, and TV work. In addition, interactive discussions with figures of note in the world of animation are held periodically, and a database of animation-related files is planned.

Some of the topics discussed in the first few weeks have been *The Little Mermaid* and *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, the most recent Japanese animation to reach the U.S., and Chuck Jones's plans for a new Daffy Duck cartoon.

The Animation Conference is one of dozens available on BIX; others include many technology-related conferences, as well as ones on science fiction, writing and journalism, current events, photography, and other subjects. The BIX service is offered at flat-rate prices in quarterly or annual subscriptions. More information is available from BIX at 1-800-227-2983.

A 25% discount on BIX rates is available to *Animato* readers and other animation fans; to take advantage of it, sign on on to the BIX computer via your modem at (617) 861-8767, and when you are asked to log in, enter "bix.animation". You will be given instructions from then on to open your BIX account.

"ONE OF THE GREATS OF CARTOONS"

BOB CLAMPETT ON
BOB MCKIMSON

BY JIM KORKIS

Robert McKimson was a Warner Bros. animator and director who never seems to get the same attention as his contemporaries Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, and Bob Clampett. In some ways, McKimson might be regarded as the forgotten director at Warner, even though he was instrumental in the creation and development of such key characters as Foghorn Leghorn, Henery Hawk, and, most importantly, the Tasmanian Devil. McKimson started as an animator for the studio in 1932, and by 1946 he was made a director, with his first assignment being Daffy Duck and Porky Pig. After Warner shut down its cartoon division in the early 1960s, McKimson eventually joined DePatie-Freleng, where he worked until his death in the late 1970s. Shortly after McKimson's death, I had the opportunity to talk with the late Bob Clampett, who had worked with the McKimson brothers, Robert and Tom, at Warner. Here are some excerpts from that previously unpublished conversation.

Jim Korkis

JIM KORKIS: When did you first meet the McKimson brothers?

BOB CLAMPETT: I was working with Harman and Ising on the Merrie Melodies, and we were starting to animate on the third one when Hugh Harman came down and personally told us that Bob and Tom would be joining us. Naturally we were curious about what these guys were like, but we never expected what a grand entrance they would make. The first morning they came in, they marched right in on the dot. They marched right in as if in perfect step, went to their desks, took off their coats, and sat down exactly at eight o'clock and started to work. This was all very spectacular, like a Busby Berkeley routine. They were dressed in polo outfits, which were very flashy-type outfits back then, and they had the breeches and boots and so forth. They also wore a black camel's hair coat and I believe a black beret.

So the first impression we got of the McKimsons was that they were there to



Foghorn Leghorn, one of McKimson's most famous characters. Drawing copyright © Warner Bros, Inc.

work. They weren't foolish guys like so many of us as the studio at that time.

I know that Walt Disney was very interested in polo.

The McKimsons were excellent polo players. That's why they were dressed in those polo outfits. I guess they were going to play after work. You're right that Walt had an interest in polo. He even organized a little Mickey Mouse team, and Bob and Tom were prominent members of that team. Bob told me they used to go play polo with the Disney team in a polo field over in the valley, which was almost right in the spot where Disney ended up building his Burbank studio. I always thought it was likely that the fact they played polo over in that area gave Walt the idea to think of that area as possibly the site of his new studio.

Were they as good at animating as they were at polo?

They had a different way of animating than we had seen before. They were much more organized than most of the guys at the studio. Some of us called them "The Mechanical McKimsons" because they could turn out a tremendous amount of animation very quickly, almost as if they had a blueprint in their mind that they were just tracing onto the paper. This was particularly true of Bob. He would sit down and be able to product very clean drawings with little if

any of the guidelines most of the rest of the artists needed to use.

Did anything ever slow him down?

Nothing. Bob was very popular with the girls, so sometimes he'd be out real late at night. The next morning he would come in right on the dot but maybe take a quick nap with his head on the desk. When he got up and started to work, it ended up that he would turn out almost twice as much work as anybody else had that day.

In what other ways were they different from the typical Warner's animator?

Well, they were very well thought of, especially by Hugh and Rudy. They were considered capable and dependable, and they never seemed to indulge in some of the foolishness around them. I remember we'd all sometimes crowd into a little projection room to see pencil tests or dailies, and people like Paul Smith and I would do these strange sound effects to the film. We'd add these silly sound effects and just get a great kick out of it. I think that they always felt very much like a wise uncle with children sometimes. They would tolerate the silly things we would do.

Was that because they might have been older?

Agewise, they were comparable to the rest of the animators. They were in their twenties, which was about the age of the rest of us. If there was a man in his mid-thirties, he would have been considered an older person in the group.

Now, were you also animating at the same time as the McKimsons?

Bob and Tom were first-rate animators at that time, while I was still sort of flubbing along. They were doing big, important jobs on the pictures. You could just look at their drawings and tell they were different. They'd mark "x's" on any area that was supposed to be colored in black, and they would use red lines to indicate a grey line, and so forth. They did nice things with their drawings that other people never got around to or never thought to do. They were very distinctive.

What type of training did they have
(Continued on page 9)

GET ANIMATED!

INDUSTRY WATCH

NEWS AND COMMENTARY BY JOHN CAWLEY

We're pleased to welcome John Cawley, author of Animato's "Fox Report" column for many issues, back to our pages with this column. John has worked in the industry for Disney, Bluth, Film Roman and other companies, and has edited several animation publications of his own, including Cartoon Quarterly (in collaboration with Jim Korkis).

The New SatAM Schedule

The 1989-90 season will go down as one of the more lame seasons in recent animation history. Fewer new shows debuted, but the percentage of losers seemed almost 100%. Most discouraging was the lack of any breakthrough or hit series. The ratings are already showing similar patterns to last year's (with ABC on the top and CBS on the bottom), which will at least give the new ABC shows some chance of survival.

Once again, the majority of new series are based on recognizable or known characters, personalities, and properties, the one exception being *Dink, the Dinosaur*. Hit movies, toys, and even designer clothes took the lion's share of starring roles. Since there will be many reviews of the new season [including Timothy Fay's in this issue], I'll limit my comments to a few trends and points.

Of most interest is the lack of difficulties in bringing *Beetlejuice* (ABC) to SatAM. Here's a series that features a dead man's adventures in the hereafter, which does not appear to be "Heaven." Next, the main relationship is between a middle-aged man (I'm ignoring the fact that he's been dead for whatever number of years) and a school-girl. If this were tried in live-action in prime time, Donald Wildmon and every self-righteous nut from the Pacific to the Atlantic would be screaming.

Another noticeable aspect of the new season is the number of shows that are mere rip-offs of films and other shows.

Captain N: the Gamemaster (NBC) is nothing more than a rehash of Disney's *Tron*; *Dink the Dinosaur* (CBS) is merely *The Land Before Time* for SatAM (even using the same species, a brontoaurus, as the lead); and *The California Raisins* (CBS) smacks of an animated *Monkees* (Hey, hey, man, we're the Raisins...).

And on a final note, what more can one say about *Rude Dog* except, "Dweeb, Dweeb, Dweeb, Dweeb, Dweeb, Dweeb..." (If you repeat this a hundred times, you will come close to the number of times the word is used in an episode.)

Bambi Bucks

The *Bambi* videotape hit video stalls already one of the top-selling videos of all time. (As of this writing, its rank is #2, but that could change once *Batman* gets going.) After several years, the Disney features have proven to be top sell-through (non-rental) titles. In

fact, Disney is one of the key factors in the booming sell-through market, especially since the studio began releasing the classic features at an initial sell-through price. Earlier titles, like *Robin Hood*, *The Sword in the Stone*, and *Pinocchio* began at a rental-aimed price of over \$60.00 and then were lowered for sales.)

Many hard-line Disney buffs fear that the sale of these classic titles on videotape will limit their future theatrical release. This is still to be tested (*Pinocchio* could be the first), but if *Lady and the Tramp*, *Cinderella*, and *Bambi* are any sign, the fans and the studio needn't really worry. Disney will be able to keep the films off the theatrical screens long enough to keep reissuing lucrative.

The video release of *Bambi* (over nine million tapes) will bring the studio around \$100 million. The last theatrical release of *Bambi* grossed around \$30 million, which would have brought the studio around \$12 million. (A studio will generally receive 1/4 to 1/3 of the gross.) Other recent Disney reissues, ranging from earlier films like *Peter Pan* to more contemporary titles like *The Rescuers*, have shown that the reissues can gross \$25-35 million, depending on title, competition, time of release, etc. Hence the video release of *Bambi* (and even earlier video successes like *Cinderella* and *Lady*) will equal several theatrical reissues.

What this boils down to is that

Anne-Marie and Charlie, the two stars of Don Bluth's *All Dogs Go to Heaven*.
Illustration copyright © 1989 Goldcrest-Sullivan-Bluth Ltd.





Cartoon by Mark Marderosian

Disney would not have to maintain its "seven-year" plan. A *Bambi* or *Lady* could be saved for ten to fifteen years after video release to go theatrical again. By that time, most of the videos would have become lost or destroyed. (Even though videotape manufacturers state that tapes will last "forever" – actually around a hundred years – that only happens with regular maintenance and proper storage, something the average consumer won't do.) When Disney brings the films back to theaters, they will probably do even stronger business, since the audience's memory will have been reinforced by multiple viewings of the tape.

Big Screen Battles: 1989

It now seems that each Fall we are to witness an animated battle at the box office. Last year it was Universal's *Land Before Time* vs. Disney's *Oliver and Company*, with *Oliver* finally coming out on top. This Fall, we have "the favorite," Disney, bringing out *The Little Mermaid*. The "challenger" is Sullivan/Bluth with *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, released by United Artists. (Another expected contender, Hanna-Barbera's *The Jetsons*, has been delayed until next Summer.)

The advantage, as usual, is with Disney. Its marketing department has been sharpened a great deal since it fumbled

The Great Mouse Detective. Once again, there are be various tie-ins with retailers and heavy advertising. *Dogs* also has several retailer tie-ins, and, on a smaller scale, heavy advertising. What it lacks is a "big name" such as Disney or Spielberg (names associated with every financially-successful animated feature Don Bluth has worked on).

The biggest problem both movies face is the dreaded "matinee menace." This occurs when the films are booked into theaters that only run them as matinees, booking a more popular, "visible" film in the evenings. These theaters make it almost impossible for the film to make much money, and additionally, children pay a reduced ticket price, further reducing profits. *Babar* suffered such a fate this past Summer, with almost all the theaters running it only during the day. Disney has had better luck at keeping films running at night, but it also occasionally runs into problems.

No matter who wins, next Fall a new battle will occur as two animated sequels face off. From Disney, audiences will get to see *The Rescuers Down Under*, while Spielberg debuts *Fievel Goes West: American Tail II* (which is not being made by Bluth). It makes one wish that the two producing parties were as interested in making good films as they are in showing who can gross the most at the box office.

CLAMPETT ON MCKIMSON

(Continued from page 7)

before Warner's?

Well, I'm not sure of all of it. I'd have to look it up and check, but I remember them telling me that their dad had been in the printing business and they may have worked in the printing shop.

I think some of that type of training affected their thinking and their organization. For example, Bob and Tom would have little stamps made up, and nobody else had this. They had little stamps saying things like "Scene Number" or "Retrace this Drawing," and other things.

Does any particular story about Bob stick out in your mind?

Yes, and this is a spectacular story. I told you that Bob was quite a fellow with the ladies. Well, one night he was returning from a date in Glendale, and up on Chevy Chase Drive somewhere he crashed his roadster into a tree or a pole. He was really badly hurt, and he was out from the studio for a long time. We would get a daily report on him and post it on the bulletin board. For a while it was really nip and tuck there. Finally, he recovered and came back to the studio, and he still had little stitches and so forth. He told me that the hit on his head had changed his mental outlook, and that he could see things in his work much clearer. He began turning out twice as much animation as before, and he was already turning out a tremendous amount of animation before the accident.

What did you think of Bob McKimson's animation?

I thought he was a marvelous animator. He moved them around well in those days, but he didn't have the warmth or the personality in the characters that you see in the great things he did on Bugs Bunny later. To me, their animation was very distinctive, but of course I was there seeing them draw it, and it made an impression on me. I think some of the others at the studio may have thought they were a little, well, conservative in their style of drawing. But even that kind of thinking wouldn't faze Bob. He wasn't one to clown around. If he believed in something, he did it and he did it well, and just plowed right ahead. I think he was one of the greats of cartoons.

SIGGRAPH, the annual convention of the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Graphics, is a mammoth convergence of the computer graphics industry that lasts a week but would take years to explore fully. Seminars and panels discuss the science and art of computer animation; acres of exhibition space display products that push graphics technology to remarkable limits.

But in many ways the heart of the show is the Computer Animation Theater, a show of the most outstanding new

works of computer animation, ranging from sophisticated technical exercises to – increasingly – films with characters as real as those in more traditionally-animated films. And for the past few years, a new film by John Lasseter and his collaborators at the computer hardware and software company Pixar has been among the most eagerly-awaited works in the show. In 1986, it was the ground-breaking Luxo Jr.; last year, it was Tin Toy, the first computer-animated film to win an Academy Award. This year, the Lasseter film that premired to a wildly enthusiastic reception was Knickknack,

an ingenious, very funny cartoon which gives us some idea of what Chuck Jones or Tex Avery might have done with computer animation. Luxo Jr. established standards for computer character animation that have inspired many of the best computer-animated films made since then; Lasseter's own subsequent films are among the finest of those films, and each one has shown us more clearly what tremendous potential this new art-form has.

I interviewed Lasseter at SIGGRAPH in Boston in August, 1989.

Harry McCracken

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN LASSETER

LUXO SR.

HARRY McCracken: *I should start by asking how you got interested in animation in the first place.*

JOHN LASSETER: I got interested in it when I was really quite young, as I guess most animators do. I used to get up very early on Saturday mornings and watch all the cartoons until the golf matches came on, or the football. And I used to go out and see all the Disney films.

When I was a freshman in high school, our library had a copy of the Bob Thomas book *The Art of Animation*, the one all about *Sleeping Beauty*. I got that, and I read it. And it was sort of funny, I realized that people actually did the job of making cartoons. And I thought, "That's what I want to do."

I can tell you *exactly* when I realized that I wanted to be an animator. It was at a screening of *The Sword and the Stone* at the local theater. I don't know if in your town there's a theater that, if a movie is playing there, you know that's it; after there, the movie's gone. It was the end of the release. Forty-nine cents. It was the Wardman Theater in Whittier.

So I saw *Sword in the Stone*, got out, my mom picked me up, and I said, "I want to work for Disney. I want to be

an animator." And luckily, my mother was an art teacher at a high school for thirty-eight years, and she was always supportive of being an artist as a profession.

I wrote to Disney and all those things through high school, and took figure drawing courses. And when I was graduating from high school, Cal Arts was forming their character animation program as a separate program from the film graphics program. The next year I went there; it was the first year of the program. I went there for four years, then went to work for Disney.

What did you work on at Disney?

When I first started working there, I did a little bit of animation on *The Fox and the Hound*. Then I worked in the story department for a while, on a number of projects that didn't get off the ground. Then I worked as an animator again, on *Mickey's Christmas Carol*.

About that time, *Tron* was being made, and that's when I got interested in computer animation. Bill Kroyer and Jerry Rees were doing it, and I saw some of the early work on that and got real excited about computer graphics. I was able to get Tom Wilhite, who at the

time was head of production at the studio, interested in combining character animation with computer-generated animation. I worked with Glen Keane, who's a brilliant animator, and we did a thirty-second test called the Wild Things test, which combined hand-drawn computer animation with computer-generated backgrounds.

After that, I went up to Lucasfilm, and started working with their computer animation group. The first thing I worked on there was *The Adventures of Andre and Wally B.*, which was a short animated film we did for SIGGRAPH in 1984, when it was in Minneapolis. Then I worked on *Young Sherlock Homes*. I've sort of done a project a year while I've been up there. In February of '86 we spun off and became Pixar and that year did *Luxo Jr.*, and then the year after that did *Red's Dream*, and then *Tin Toy*, and this year *Knickknack*.

Did you leave Disney because you wanted them to get more involved in computer animation then they were at the time?

Yes, sort of. At the time, the expense was so much, and there was very little that had been developed. It required a lot

of development in order for it to be usable. The Wild Things test proved to be really successful, I think, in proving that it could work, but also it was quite expensive at the time. They were concerned that it was just too expensive.

There were still some people who stayed dedicated to computer animation, and since they've done some great work with it, of course.

Was there a point when you felt you reached a breakthrough with your work in computer animation? There's a much bigger difference between Andre and Wally B. and Luxo Jr. in style and approach than between Luxo and the films that have followed.

Right. It's pretty obvious that *Luxo Jr.* was a real breakthrough, not only for me and Pixar but for the industry as well. When we were spun off and became Pixar, they said, "For the first year of Pixar, we want to have a film in the film show at SIGGRAPH. You guys do it."

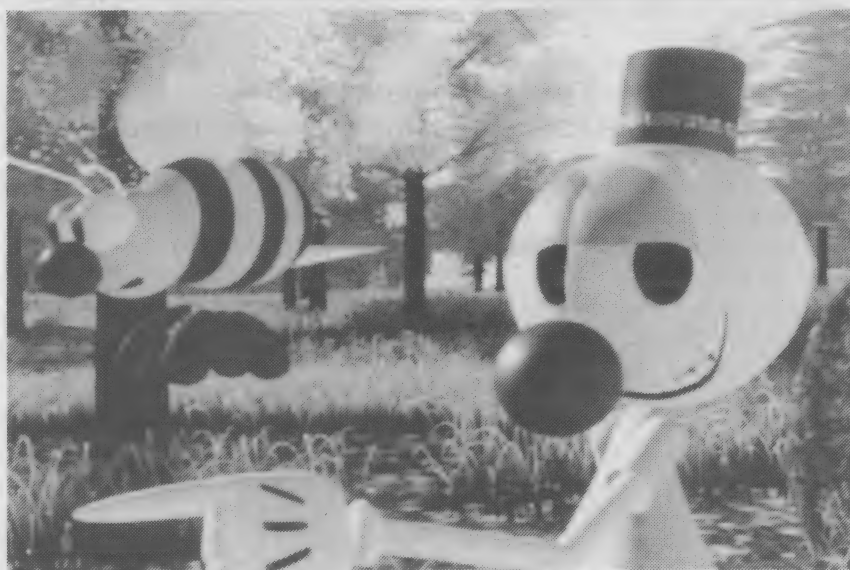
Bill Reeves, Eben Ostby and myself didn't have a film we wanted to do. So we all sort of did a little something we wanted to. Bill was working on some interesting research on waves, so he did a little piece with waves. Eben was doing some procedural animation; he did something with a beach chair. And I was interested in doing things with lamps. I had done some student films with them, and they were kind of fun.

I started working on doing lamps. I modelled one Luxo lamp: and then a friend of mine came over with his baby. And then I went back to working on the lamp, and wondered what the lamp would look like as a baby. I scaled different parts of it down: the springs are the same diameter, but they're much shorter. The same with the rods. The shade is small but the bulb is the same size. The reason the bulb is the same size is because that's something you buy at the hardware store; it doesn't grow.

So I animated it, and the story developed as I went, and we premiered it at SIGGRAPH. I love showing the films at SIGGRAPH because you get such a great reaction. The reaction to *Luxo Jr.* was phenomenal; people had never seen anything quite like that before, and it got a really wonderful ovation.

The thing I wanted to do in *Luxo Jr.* was make the characters and story the most important thing, not the fact that it was done with computer graphics. As

PIXAR FILM BY FILM: A FILMOGRAPHY



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The Adventures of Andre and Wally B. (1984)

Directed by Alvy Ray Smith. Scene design: William Reeves. Animation: John Lasseter.

The first Pixar cartoon – directed by computer graphics pioneer Alvy Ray Smith and animated by Lasseter – is the only one that is (at least five years down the road) more interesting as an experiment than as an entertainment. The story is simple: a bee (Wally) and a bug-like little critter (Andre) engage in brief combat in a forest clearing. The two characters are animated in a rubber-hose style that's reminiscent of 1930s Disney; while they're well done, they remain impressive pieces of computer graphics more than living creatures. One ends up admiring the technical accomplishments – the motion blur in the characters' movements and the realism of its forest – at least as much as the story and characters.

you see in the film show at SIGGRAPH, a lot of times it's computer graphics for computer graphics nerds. People get excited about it purely because it was generated with a computer.

I wanted people who had never even seen a computer before to look at it and enjoy it as a film. I did a couple of things: I locked the camera down, didn't move it.

There's so much stuff flying around in computer films.

Oh God, yeah; you get sick. They do it because you can do it. And people tend to have real bright colors, without thinking about the way things look.

After the film show, Jim Blinn, who's one of the pioneers in this field, came running up to me and said, "John, I have to ask you a question." And I thought, "God, I don't know anything about these algorithms; I know he's going to ask me about the shadow algorithms or some-

thing like that." And he asked me, "John, was the parent lamp a mother or a father?"

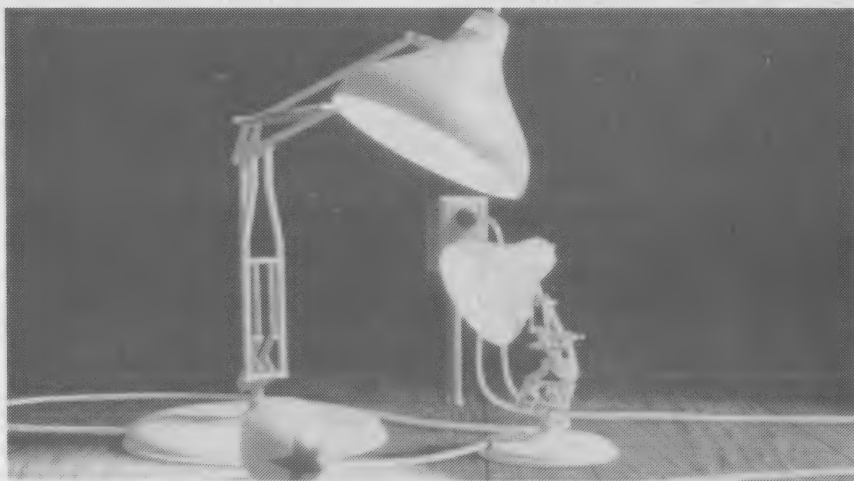
You figured you had succeeded then.

Yes, exactly. Here, one of the real brains in computer graphics was concerned more about whether the parent lamp was a mother or a father.

It's interesting; that question keeps coming up. A lot of people say it's a mother; a lot of people say it's a father.

I always envisioned it as a father, but it's based greatly on my mother. To me, if it was a mother lamp, she would never let the baby jump up on that ball. But the dad is like, "Go ahead, jump up on it, fall off and break your bulb. You'll learn a lesson."

What role do you play in making your computer-animated films, in comparison to the role the director or animator plays in the creation of a traditional animated film?



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Luxo Jr. (1986)

Written and directed by John Lasseter. Technical director: William Reeves. Procedural animation: Eben Ostby.

The breakthrough. This tale of a playful child and cautious parent who happen to be desk lamps completely avoids the problems computer character animation had been dealing with rather unsuccessfully until that point – the difficulties of modelling and putting into motion a human-like form, dealing with stretch and squash, and so forth. That the two characters without heads, arms, or legs, are expressive, instantly-identifiable personalities would be a remarkable accomplishment no matter what the medium the film was made in. (It has been remarked that this cartoon might have well been done in stop-motion animation; given its utterly convincing photorealistic look, that might be true in a strictly economical sense. But the intent, of course, was to push the computer graphics envelope, not tell the story as cheaply as possible.)

Luxo Jr. remains Pixar's purest expression of what computer character animation can be, and a film with undiminished ability to startle and delight both viewers new to computer graphics and those jaded by overexposure to them.

I come up with the initial concepts. We bounce the idea around with the crew we have. Most of them have computer backgrounds, but over the years they've become quite savvy with animation and stories.

So we usually develop the stories together, and I'll do the storyboard. From the storyboard we define what needs to be modeled. We generally divide up the modelling task between the crew. I'll do some modelling, and then I'll do all the animation, generally. Some of the other people have started doing a little bit of the animation.

I also direct it as far as what it looks like, color decisions, staging it, doing the angles. It's sort of up to me to keep the storyline together in my head. And then Bill and Eben usually are the ones who render it, after I'm finished doing the animation.

Have you been particularly influenced by any artists in your work?

Yes. There's Walt Disney; his films are just brilliant in their staging and characters, of course. Chuck Jones is probably my next biggest influence. As a director, he has the greatest timing there is; I think you'll agree with that.

But also there's Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston as animators. The reason I like their work so much is that they do such great characters. I love the work of Ward Kimball as well; he's a big influence. But his work, and Milt Kahl's work, are much more identifiable. You'll look at Milt Kahl's work and say, "Oh, there's a Milt Kahl scene." His stuff is brilliant, but I think Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston do work where the character is it, is everything, and their stuff just comes alive.

Also Norman McLaren and the Canadian Film Board...

How has he influenced you - his use of color?

Yes, and also his series of films called "Animated Motion." They're such wonderful teaching tools.

You know, in going to Cal Arts, and being born and raised in Los Angeles, Disney and Warner Bros. cartoons were basically my sole influence. But since I left Disney and started doing short films, I've been going to animation festivals around the world. And that's like a whole new world that's opened up to me of short films: the Film Board, all the European films, and even things from the United States. Stuff that you never, ever see, and it's such great work. The work of Paul Driessen, the work of Bill Condie. Cordell Barker's *The Cat Came Back* is just fabulous. I keep getting influenced by these people.

And I loved *Roger Rabbit*. It's almost like an animated film for animators. All the gags they pulled from history. They just went nuts, and it's really fun.

What are some of the stumbling blocks in using computer animation – things you'd like to do but can't? Is that in your mind much?

In computer animation there are a lot of limitations that traditional animation doesn't have. And vice versa, actually. As soon as I started working with computer animation, I realized that the easiest thing to do in hand-drawn animation are the most difficult to do in computer animation. An example of that is organic shapes, like *Dopey* and all the great animation of the Dwarfs. You see that and it's just so fluid, and yet it seems connected. That's so hard to do with computer animation; it's virtually impossible. It's easy to make a sphere or any object scale in X, Y, or Z, but to make something move around and keep the same volume is so hard. We keep doing research in that area.

But then trying to animate a room with a moving camera shot in hand animation, is also virtually impossible. And also, the shadowing, and shading, and lighting, and reflection, refraction...all that stuff you get in computer animation is virtually impossible to do in hand animation. To me, it's really important for animators to understand the medium they're working in, whether it's sand animation, clay animation, cel animation, or computer animation.

Traditional animation is one cheat after another. It's always an illusion of depth, or illusion of this or that. When I work with the computer graphics

guys, they seem much more to be purists. They *really* want it to be truly refractive, truly this or that. So I've introduced a lot of traditional animation-like cheats into the computer animation we do, and it's really broadened their perspective a little bit.

We keep pushing the boundaries out, and now I know exactly what areas are very important to me but difficult to do, and those are the areas are the kinds of places we focus in on. If you've seen procedural animation, like Chris Wedge's *Balloon Guy*, where things are just kind of blubblubblubla. (Flops around loosely in imitation of Balloon Guy) – I love that kind of thing. The way Chris did it with *Balloon Guy* is great, because he as an animator defined the initial stuff, and then let the computer do it.

There are a lot of people who are just letting the computer do the animation. You can just type in "Character Walk," and it'll walk someplace. That takes the fun out of it for the animator. So what we've done is always keep the animator in initial control, and then let the computer do some of the more mundane stuff. The first use of procedural animation was in *Luxo Jr.*: the ball rolling. Making a ball roll on the ground is actually quite difficult, because you have to match the translation with the rotation, and the size of the ball and so on. And I sat there with a calculator figuring all this out, and I realized, "What am I doing? Computers should be able to do this."

So Eben wrote this whole procedural animation system we have that does that. In *Red's Dream* we did it with the unicycle: the wheels turning, and keeping the pedals flat, and all that. All I did was do a pass, with the timing of it and the character moving around. The snow (in *Knickknack*) is another good example. I just animated the character, and played with a few parameters, and the computer did all of the snow floating around. So as we go on, more and more tools are being developed. It's getting more and more power, but the animator still has the initial control, and we can still tweak it after the computer is done.

Which of your films or characters do you think has been most successful so far in achieving what you want to do?

Luxo Jr., without question. *Tin Toy* won the Oscar, but I wish the baby had been a little more cute. But the story was to the point where it was a baby-

monster, so it worked. It worked really well, in fact; it may have been better, since the baby looked kind of bizarre, than it might have if the baby was really, really cute.

I like the sad ending in *Red's Dream*. *Knickknack* I think works really quite well. It's surprising the reaction that it's getting. But generally, most peoples' favorite is *Luxo Jr.*, because it's just this little simple thing, and it's complete on its own.

Knickknack seems more cartoony than your other films.

Right, it was a very conscious decision.

It's more of a gag cartoon.

Right. After *Tin Toy*, we really wanted to do a *cartoon*. I went back and looked at my collection of Chuck Jones and things.

Another thing I wanted to ask you about was the sound effects in your films. They seem more important than in most animated films, and I was wondering if that was something related to

the fact that you're working in computer animation, or if you'd do that no matter what.

I'd do that no matter what. It's the work of Gary Rydstrom, who works at Sprocket Systems, which is the post-production facility at Lucasfilm. He's brilliant; we've become really close friends.

Sound has been very important to me. Actually back when I was a student and first began cutting sound effects to go with my animation, I had this scene where a lamp was falling from a shelf and breaking its lightbulb. I was trying all these big crashes, and nothing was working. And I accidentally synched up the wrong sound to it, which was this little tiny minute little "tink," with this big camera jar and everything. I just cracked up because it gave it a completely different feeling. And in a way, it was that moment that I realized how important good sound effects were.

On *Andre and Wally B.* the sound was done by Ben Burtt, who's won numerous Oscars for *Star Wars* and *Raiders* and all those things, and he had so



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Red's Dream (1987)

Written and directed by John Lasseter. Technical direction: Eben Ostby, William Reeves, H.B. Siegel.

This melancholy tale of a unicycle who dreams of circus stardom has a star even less minimally equipped by nature to be an actor than *Luxo Jr.*'s desk lamps, and yet who has at least as much personality. (You've never seen a human being juggle with as much feeling as the cycle puts into bouncing balls off of his seat/head). The film also features some of Pixar's most photorealistic rendering, particularly in the opening bicycle-shop scene, and the clown who figures in "Red's" dream is a (not-terribly-satisfying) precursor of *Tin Toy*'s baby.

If this cartoon has attracted relatively little attention among the Pixar cartoons, it's probably because it's a low-key, genuinely bittersweet film, and an impressive example of the Pixar artists' range.

much fun doing it. And Gary's done all the sound effects from *Luxo Jr.* on. I bring Gary in even before the storyboard is complete; I'll show him the initial ideas, and I always leave lots of openings in my animation for Gary to do stuff. *Tin Toy* was probably the peak, because he did all that wonderful stuff. Just the fact that it was a one-

man band was for Gary, because I knew he would have a lot of fun doing it.

On *Tin Toy*, he was cutting the sound effects for *Cocoon II* at the same time. *Cocoon II* took him about a day, day and a half to do the sound effects for one reel. Eight or nine reels make up a complete film. Gary took six weeks to do the sound effects for *Tin Toy*, be-

cause he was so into it. He was so into it because he loved it. He was doing it on his own time, and he kept layering and layering sound after sound. There must have been twenty different tracks for *Tin Toy*, and it really shows, because it's so rich.

Also, I've found that when I do animation, it's very important for me that you get a sense that the character is made out of a particular something. I wanted the feeling with the lamps (in *Luxo Jr.*) that their bases were very heavy, so when they land it's with a thud, and so on. In *Tin Toy* it was very important to get a sense that the character was made out of tin, and that the baby was flesh-and-blood and much more massive. Sound really helps.

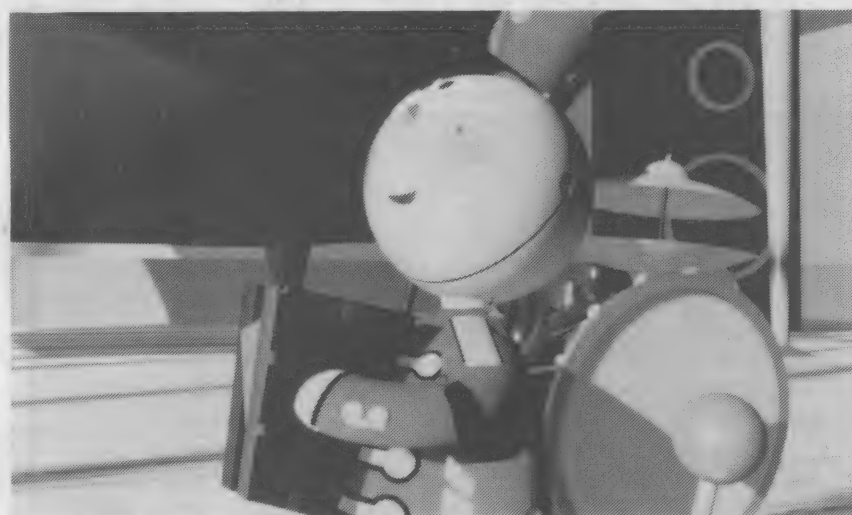
Is there a reason why all your films are basically in pantomime?

You noticed that. I've done two student films, one called *Lady and the Lamp*, and the other called *Nightmare*. *Lady and the Lamp* won a student Academy Award in 1979 for animation, and then *Nightmare* won the same award the next year. *Lady and the Lamp*, my very first film, is the only one that has any dialogue.

Each film, I want to give myself a challenge, to make it interesting. If you keep doing the same old thing, it's "Ho, hum." With *Lady and the Lamp*, it's the story of a lamp shop where all the lamps are alive, and this one little lamp breaks its lightbulb and goes blind. It feels around trying to find another lightbulb and ends up screwing in a gin bottle and getting drunk, and destroying the lamp shop. And it was very important that that I wanted to do this character that didn't talk. The lamp doesn't talk; it's the shopkeeper that talks. I wanted to get the sense that he was a character without doing the typical thing of sticking a face on an inanimate object. And I think I succeeded.

The next year, everyone at Cal Arts was doing things with dialogue. I wanted to do *Nightmare* without any dialogue, to just let the film play by itself. It was a challenge at the time to do it without dialogue. And then when I went back and did *Luxo Jr.*, I just went on from there.

So you were thinking that way before you got involved with computer animation.



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Tin Toy (1988)

Directed and animated by John Lasseter. Technical direction: William Reeves, Eben Ostby. Additional animation: Reeves, Ostby, Craig Good.

The first (and, as of yet, only) Oscar-winning computer-animated cartoon stars a rather demonic baby and the wind-up one man band who attempts, with mixed results, to entertain him. This is Lasseter's most elaborate film, and one of his most entertaining (if not perhaps as delightfully self-contained as some of the others). While the baby is a terrific creation and one of the most believable human characters done in computer animation so far, the tin toy ("Tinny") is still a much more multi-dimensional character – his shy smile may be the most beguiling bit of animation in any of Lasseter's films.

Tin Toy's audio is as much a part of its success as the visuals; the use of sound effects creates a significant portion of the film's atmosphere. (There is no dialogue and not too much music, and the film doesn't suffer for lack of either.)

Oh yes. One thing that Chuck Jones said that always has been in my mind – I guess it was a comment towards Saturday morning cartoons – is that with really good animation you should be able to turn the sound off and still know what's going on. That's something I've always taken to heart, and it's been the foundation of my stories in a lot of ways.

I think maybe soon I'll start experimenting with doing dialogue with computer animation. Generally, the dialogue I've seen with computer animation has been pretty weak. There are all these principles and things that over the years people have developed with animating dialogue. At Disney, they teach you certain things, and I'm real interested in applying those to computer animation as well, like I've applied the other principles of animation, like stretch and squash, and anticipation, and timing and so on.

Are you interested, when it becomes economically feasible, in doing longer computer-animated films, like features?

Yes, that's what we're working towards. The goal of our group is to eventually do a feature film. Ever since I've been with the group, we've been researching and developing computer animation systems, and with my influence it's very important to have computer animation systems that are developed for traditional animators to use. It takes quite a bit of training, but the tools are there that people are used to. And we want to get into longer forms of animation.

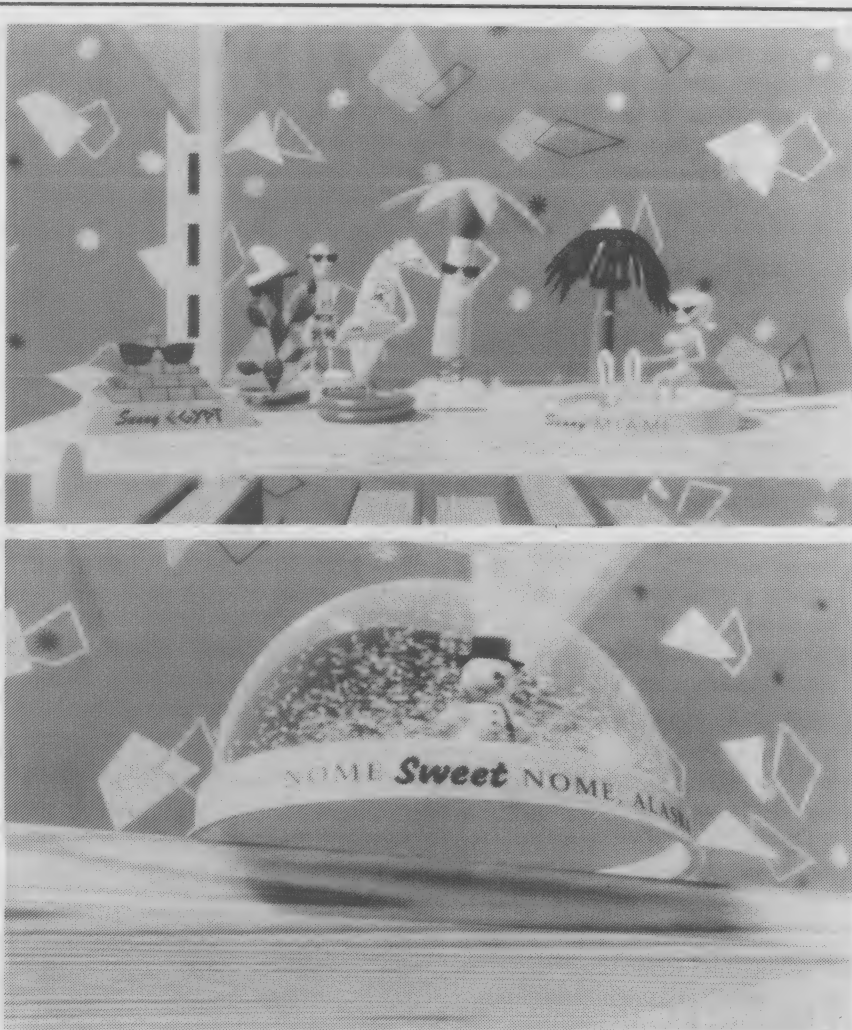
When will that become feasible?

It's hard to say, but not long. We're starting to develop some longer-format stuff.

Where do you see computer animation and yourself being in ten years or so? Do you see an end to hand-drawn animation?

Never. Never, never, never, never. Computer animation is *different* than hand-drawn animation. One of the misnomers that a lot of people think about is that computers go into other industries and replace hand workers. It's not that way at all with computer animation; it's a very different look.

Where I see the future, to be honest, is something I want to do more of: a



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***Knickknack* (1989)**

Pixar animation production group: John Lasseter, Eben Ostby, Craig Good, Flip Phillips, Tony Apodaca, William Reeves, Ralph Guggenheim, Don Conway, Yael Milo, Deidre Warin.

Knickknack is Lasseter's cartooniest cartoon, a film which eschews strict photorealism in favor of a pastel look that goes well with the Bobby McFerrin soundtrack. The plot is a Tex Avery-like series of gags built around a little snowman's attempt to break free of his tacky paperweight to join the other knickknacks residing on the other side of the shelf that holds them; the expression that covers the snowman's face before each attempt is worthy of Chuck Jones. Comparing the snowman to *Andre* and *Wally B.*'s Andre is indicative of the tremendous distance Lasseter and the other Pixar artists have taken their craft in just five years.

It takes a second, dispassionate viewing to appreciate the film's technical excellence, especially the physics at work as the snowman lumbers about in his water-filled dome, kicking up clouds of artificial snow. (The film exists in both a stereoscopic form and a more widely-seen two-dimensional format; the 3-D version is worth seeking out for its imaginative use of the form.)

combination of character animation done by hand, and character animation done by computers, and backgrounds done by painting and computer combined together. The technology we're developing is going to make it a lot more feasible to do that sort of thing, so it blends together better than in the

past. Cel animation looks so different than computer animation, but I think with developments like what we did in the *Wild Things* test, and like in *Roger Rabbit* – the shading that they achieved – you'll be able to make cel animation look a little rounder, more like you can do with computer animation.

TERMITE TERRACE TENANCY:

VIRGIL ROSS REMEMBERS



"On with the show, this is it!"
Bugs and Daffy puttin' on the ritz
in a drawing by Virgil Ross
done to accompany this interview.
Characters copyright © 1989
Warner Bros., Inc.

VIRGIL ROSS /

AN INTERVIEW BY JOHN PROVINCE

Virgil Ross was a key animator for Warner Bros. for thirty years. His talent and unique contributions graced some of the finest work to emerge from the animation units of Tex Avery, Bob Clampett, and Friz Freleng. As a longtime admirer of Mr. Ross, I set out on a year-long quest to locate him, and finally succeeded in June of 1989. As I talked with him and his charming wife Frances (a former ink-and-paint girl at Warner's, where they met), I discovered that his ability to create magic moments on film is only one facet of this talented individual. He received the prestigious Annie award from ASIFA-Hollywood in 1987, and is a holder of the Fifty-Year Achievement Award from the Motion Pictures Screen Cartoonists Guild.

Despite the recent attention, Virgil, now 83, remains amazed that his work on the Warner Bros. cartoons has survived and is remembered with so much affection. He continues to be a most

self-effacing and modest individual when discussing his contributions to his craft. Virgil Ross welcomes letters from fans, but has requested, in order to preserve the quiet life that he and his wife enjoy, that letters be sent in care of me at 1158 Purdy St., Spring Valley, CA 92077. Your letters will be promptly forwarded to Virgil unopened.

John Province

JOHN PROVINCE: When and where did you begin your career in animation?

VIRGIL ROSS: In 1930, at the old Mintz studio, inbetweening on the Krazy Kat series. I had been in commercial art, doing show cards and things like that, not making any money. Someone saw some of my cartoons and said I should look up Walt Disney. The commercial art business wasn't going anywhere. So I went to the Disney studio over on Hyperion, and they said

they would be in touch. While I was out, I figured I'd try someone else, so I looked up Mintz studios in the telephone book and went over. Dick Huemer, Manny Gould, and Ben Harrison were their top men then. Dick Huemer was working on the Toby the Pup cartoons. Ben Harrison looked my stuff over and hired me right on the spot. I felt very lucky that I started out as an inbetweenner, and not at the bottom washing cels or something. I was only with them for about a year.

Where did you go from there?

Chuck Jones had begun at Mintz at the same time I did, but he switched over to Ub Iwerks's studio. He called me one day and asked if I'd be interested in working over there with him. So I moved to Iwerks in September of 1931. It only lasted three months. They laid us all off right after Christmas. If I'd stayed with Mintz, I probably could have stayed

working a little longer. There wasn't a whole lot to do at Iwerks. They did Flip the Frog, and that was about it.

Iwerks was really more of a technician than an artist, wasn't he?

Oh yes, that's true. He was always working on something...new ways to photograph the cels. Very advanced for the time. He was a genius, but not much of a businessman. Most geniuses aren't. [Laughs]

What happened after you left Iwerks?

Well in 1931 and 1932, no one was doing any hiring to speak of. It was in the heart of the Depression. Just about all of the studios shut down for at least a while. We were all out of work, even Chuck Jones. In May of 1933, I managed to get in with Walter Lantz, working on the Oswald the Lucky Rabbit cartoons. I called him up on the phone, and he said, "Sure, c'mon over!" I don't think he knew I had worked in the business.

I worked up a few samples to show him. He looked them over, and then talked to a few fellows I'd known at Mintz, and hired me for \$25 a week. Come to think of it, when I went to full animator, he still only paid me \$25 a week! [Laughs]

Is that where you started working with Tex Avery?

Yes, Tex was already an animator at Lantz when I arrived there. They later made him a director, and a couple of the inbetweeners were promoted to animator; I was one of the lucky ones. When Tex went to work for Leon Schlesinger in the Summer of 1935, he took me with him. Lantz offered to up me to \$30 a week, but I wanted to stay with Tex. Best decision I ever made.

Do you have any idea how long Tex had been in the business when you met him?

No I don't, but he must have gotten into it very early. I know he began at the very bottom, wasing cels, and worked his way up the ladder. You've probably heard of the place we worked called Termites Terrace? It was an old, broken-down bungalow in the middle of the Warner lot. They put me and Tex in there because we were on trial, and they didn't

know if we'd be staying or not. But of course after his first picture he was in solid from then on.

Everyone looked forward to seeing Tex's pictures, because they had funnier stuff in them. Tex invented the idea of using the offscreen narrator in the films. These are the ones where everything is more or less reversed, like the tourists getting off the ship and the natives on the tropical island are waiting with cameras to take pictures of *them*. We did a whole series of travelogue pictures. They lent themselves to a whole new set of gags based on everything being reversed.

Tex's drawings were kind of rough, but the action was great! He used to animate straight ahead, rather than from extreme to extreme, just like in the very earliest days of animation. He just let his instincts guide him, and his timing was absolutely terrific! Nobody could do it like Tex, because he was all instinct. I think that's why we got along so well. I had the same feeling, and I think he appreciated that. I worked for him my first seven years at the studio, from 1935 to 1942.

You worked with him on the first Bugs Bunny cartoon. That was A Wild Hare, back in 1940.

Yes, that was all Tex's stuff. We received orders from the story department that they needed a drawing of a bunny. We all did drawings, and tacked them on the wall, and the storymen voted on them. We had one writer nicknamed "Bugs" Hardaway, and for some reason, this one drawing became known as "Bugs' Bunny." Leon Schlesinger liked the sound of the name, and told them to keep it, and that's how Bugs Bunny got his name. Years later, before he died, Hardaway tried to get some credit for making the character, which he probably deserved. But Warner Bros. owned the right to everything we created.

Do you know why Tex Avery left Warner Bros. for MGM? Was it money?

It might have been money, but maybe he thought he could do better at MGM. Basically I think he wanted to work with some of the guys over there, some of whom were considered to be the top men in the business. That's my theory. Tex was very ambitious.

In later years, did he ever talk to you

about MGM?

No, I only saw him a few times in the years after he left Warner's. He was mostly MGM, and I like to remember him the way he was when we worked together at the Warner studio.

After Tex Avery left, you worked for Bob Clampett. Did you start out at the studio together?

Yes. There were only four of us when I started out: myself, Chuck Jones, Sid Sutherland, and Bob Clampett. Bob was in good with Leon Schlesinger, and he knew Chuck, and they both started directing together by 1937, and later split into two units.

So Clampett was also spared the apprenticeship of having to wash cels.

I'm pretty sure he had worked somewhere before that. He was only about twenty years old when he started at Schlesinger. Clampett's father was a Chrysler dealer who knew Leon Schlesinger, and that's how he got into the studio, I think.

How was working with Bob Clampett as compared to Tex Avery?

I was with him for about a year. Actually, we didn't hit it off too well. I didn't seem to have what he wanted most of the time. I worked on *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* the year I was with him, and I think it was one of the best things I ever worked on. I just didn't feel the same with him as I had with Tex. He was always a nice enough fellow, and he was good, no doubt about that. I never really knew where I stood with him, but he turned out a lot of good pictures.

Coal Black is consistently voted one of the best cartoons ever made, and is a great underground classic.

I worked mostly on the Prince. Bob took us into downtown Los Angeles, into the nightclub section, to watch the latest dances and pick up some atmosphere. Some of it was pretty funny stuff that we actually used in the picture: real tall guys dancing with real short little women, and they'd swing their legs right over the tops of their heads!

There was a fellow over in Friz Freleng's unit who wanted to come over to

Bob's, and they made us switch. It turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to me. I was with Friz for twenty of the thirty years I was with Warner Bros.

Do you have any idea why Clampett eventually left not just the studio, but for a while animation itself?

No, I don't, but it was probably a good thing, because once he got that *Beany and Cecil* thing off the ground, I think it was a lot better than anything he would have done at Warner's.

What were your working procedures like under Friz Freleng?

We used to make a pencil rough of the entire picture. Then Friz would bring us in and decide what needed to be changed. We were assigned just individual scenes, with no idea what had happened before or what was happening after. It was pretty hard to judge them that way, because in order to analyze them properly, you really should know what it's going to be hooked up with. If they had run the scenes connected with all of the others, I doubt we would have had to make so many changes, but that's how we did it for years.

We were expected to turn out between twenty-five and thirty feet per week, and we'd run it two, maybe three times. If you needed more than that, you probably wouldn't be there very long. Considering the amount of work we were expected to turn out, I think we did pretty good. Friz was exacting, but the results were three or four Academy Awards! He was a good director and had good ideas.

You worked on almost all of the characters; who were your favorites?

I'd have to say Bugs Bunny. I always liked working with him. Any character that's long and lanky is always easier to work with.

At one time, Bugs was the most popular character in the whole business. I've always had thoughts that this was not because he was drawn any better, but because of his character. He's a cocky guy that always gets away with it, and I think people like that. Maybe that's the way they'd like to be, with everything turning out their way.

I liked working on Yosemite Sam and Daffy Duck. Sam was a good, wild character, and you gave it everything you



Virgil Ross poses with his Annie award from ASIFA-Hollywood, the Screen Cartoonists Guild Fifty-Year Career Award, and a wascally onlooker.

had when you worked on him. Now a character like Daffy is great to work on, because he's always moving, bouncing all over the place.

I worked a lot on Tweety and Granny. You have to fake it a lot when you're drawing Tweety, because his feet are so much bigger than the body, and there is no way a little bird like that could move around with those big, long feet. There's a way to fake it that I could show you on paper, but it's pretty hard to try and explain it.

I didn't like working on Porky Pig too much. Porky was originally like a big, fat man, and we eventually brought him down to where he was more like a little boy. It was a lot better after that. He was basically a straight character, and there wasn't a lot you could do with him. When he stuttered, was that a lot

of work!

You used a lot of the Warner Bros. film stars themselves, especially those with great faces like Peter Lorre and Edward G. Robinson. Ever get any feedback from the stars you used?

I don't know. A lot of the time we would use ourselves, and we used Friz a lot. Nobody on the outside knew, of course, and we all got a real bang out of it.

Did Jack Warner ever demonstrate any interest whatsoever in what was coming out of Termite Terrace?

I don't think he did. In the thirty years I worked there, I never met him once. It's possible he could have come over and

visited with Leon Schlesinger.

There were personnel changes during the 1950s. What was the studio like during those years?

There were always three units [during the 1950s], Bob McKimson's, Chuck Jones's of course, and Friz's. Frank Tashlin had been there before Bob, but he got out of it and became a big movie director. He was a kind of genius, but you never knew where it was going to pop up.

Did you ever do any work for Bob McKimson?

Not after they made him a director. For a long time he was a sort of overseer for all the units. They would have him check our models and things, because he could draw so good. He didn't sketch things out; he always drew them straight and they were perfect.

For some reason, his stuff always looked just a little stiff to me.

Well, he was sort of a stiff character himself. McKimson's films were all pretty much the same. They weren't bad at all, but I don't think they were the funniest; I think Friz's were. But Bob was great at doing spot drawings.

As much as yours and Chuck Jones's paths have crossed over the years, I'm surprised that you were never in his unit.

You know, I did do some work for him at his studio about ten years ago, and it wasn't until then I realized how easy it was to work for him. His layouts were so good that it was almost inbetweening. One thing I liked about Chuck is that if you had a better idea, he'd probably go along with it. His version of Bugs was always a little smaller than ours, and just a bit different: younger, almost like a kid. Whereas ours was a fully-grown adult.

I think that for me personally, some of the best scenes you ever did were the ones in which the characters would dance. The action is so smooth!

Well, I used to be pretty good at something they called "slicker dancing" during the 1920s and 1930s, and I had a feeling for those kinds of scenes.

Did you ever use any of your own steps on Bugs?

Yes, I suppose so, but I always had a feeling for flowing motion, and I don't like to see anything jerky. What pleases me is watching something like ice skaters, or Fred Astaire. That's the type of thing I always liked to put into my animation, something with a flowing quality.

I always had an eye for movement, and I think this kept me in the business a lot longer than a lot of guys, despite the fact that I really wasn't very good at drawing. When I started out in animation, you didn't have to be a good artist. I just had a little natural talent, and it's mostly just timing anyway.

It's all a matter of getting good layouts, and we had one of the best men in the business, Hawley Pratt. When you're in the swing of things, you can usually follow it pretty well. You're basically an actor on paper when you come right down to it. I came from a musical family, and I play piano by ear, and at one time played old-time jazz piano in a dance band.

So you feel that your outside interests in music really helped you with your animation?

Definitely. Basically I can just feel it. Instinct, I guess.

The increased popularity of television in the early 1950s ended the careers of a lot of studio animators. Were you ever affected by the slowdown in the business?

No, the 1950s were the best time for me. That's when Friz won his Academy Awards. It began to slow down in the early 1960s, and by 1963 it was mostly over, as I recall.

Were you at the studio until the very end?

Almost. I saw what was coming and left in 1962. I wound up at Hanna-Barbera. I later worked for Filmation, when they were just starting up, and also for DePatie-Freleng. I would work at these little studios for a while and then move on. Filmation began as a little two-man outfit, and for a while were pretty big, almost as big as Hanna-Barbera. They've just within the last few months quit the business.

What do you think of current animation? Chuck Jones calls it "illustrated radio."

[Laughs] Yes, well, a lot of it is like that. I will say that if it hadn't been for Hanna-Barbera and their limited animation, a lot of us would have had to retire when the studios started closing. They've been pretty successful with their limited animation, and the stuff looks good considering how limited it is. The talking heads look a little mechanical, but the Flintstones are nicely drawn.

Did you see Who Framed Roger Rabbit?

Just a piece of it on television. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but it moved too fast for me. It was too much, and I couldn't follow it. What I saw was a lot of great animation going by in a flash and being wasted.

Are you still artistically active? Do you draw for your own pleasure?

No, not really. I would rather play old-time jazz piano. Once in a while, at an awards show, kids will come up to me and want a drawing of Bugs Bunny. I usually make one at home and send it to them.

Do you still do any professional jobs?

Once in a while, they'll ask me to come in and work on a commercial or something over at Warner's, which is just a little operation now, nothing like the old days. I'd be doing it for fun, really. I sure don't need the money, and would probably be taking work away from some young fellow who needs the job.

Well, Mr. Ross, I'd like to thank you for letting me talk with you today. It's been a real pleasure to be able to meet you and discuss your career. I don't think anyone can deny that the Warner Bros. cartoons are some of the very best ever made.

That's what I've been hearing more and more of lately. When I used to tell people I was an animator, they'd say, "Oh, you work for Walt Disney?" [Laughs] Everyone thinks of Disney when they think of animation, and that's the only studio I never got around to working at!

Interview copyright © 1989 John Province.

WELCOME TO BURBANK, FLORIDA

A VISIT TO WALT DISNEY ANIMATION FLORIDA

BY HARRY MCCRACKEN



An aerial view of the Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park. The photographs accompanying this article are copyright © 1989 The Walt Disney Company.

The Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park, which joined the Magic Kingdom and EPCOT Center at Walt Disney World last May, is a place where pieces of movie legend – from Dorothy's ruby slippers to the piano on which Sam played it again to Hollywood Boulevard itself – have somehow magically landed in central Florida. Tucked in one corner of the place is one of the most significant Hollywood icons that has made the trip: an animation studio making Disney cartoons with classic characters like Mickey Mouse and new stars like Roger Rabbit.

While the attraction opened its doors to Disney World visitors only this year, in one sense its roots stretch back to the 1930s, when Disney first began having to explain that it did not offer tours of its animation studio. (An earlier stab at addressing this problem grew from a proposed playground on the Burbank studio property into Disneyland.) Planning for the Disney-MGM Studios project began not long after the present Disney studio management led by Michael Eisner assumed power, and the resulting park combines facets of the Magic Kingdom and EPCOT Center into a theme park which compliments its two neighbors on the Disney property. (If the Magic Kingdom's greatest appeal is to children, and EPCOT is of particular interest to grownups, Disney-MGM seems to be aimed most squarely at teenagers and young adults. Of course, all three parks are perfectly capable of captivating visitors of any age.)

The park's attractions range from the purely fanciful – a Hollywood Boulevard inspired more by every movie fan's dreams than the actual street, an elaborate ride through great moments in film history – to a working film production center where visitors can discover how movies are made. It is here that the animation studio tour is located, along with a "Backstage Movie Tour" built around soundstages and sets where live-action television programs, movies, and commercials are filmed.

The animation building really holds two intertwined operations: a Disney-MGM Theme Park attraction – "The Magic of Disney Animation" – and an animation studio – Walt Disney Animation Florida – that will be producing animated shorts and featurettes as well as other special projects. The attrac-

tion, which makes the actual animation studio the centerpiece of an experience that includes films and an art exhibit, does a fine job of taking visitors behind the scenes of Disney animation. While there is humor, in the form of a film and several short video presentations featuring Robin Williams, the overall tone is scholarly, almost reverent; the mood is reminiscent of Frank Thomas and Oliver Johnston's *Disney Animation: the Illusion of Life* or one of the other big art books on the studio's work. (Interestingly, the animation studio tour is much more serious and less glitzy than the live-action studio tour that sits next door on the Disney-MGM lot.)

Walt Disney Animation Florida's staff had to be built from scratch, a not-inconsiderable task given that the state does not have a natural abundance of professional animators. (Although once upon a time there was another major animation studio in the state; see this issue's "Koko Komments" for more information on the Fleischer studio's period there.)

The staff includes eight animators from a variety of backgrounds: Mark Henn came to the studio after contributing to every Disney animated feature from *The Fox and the Hound* to *The Little Mermaid* (for which he animated many of the title character's scenes). Brigitte Hartley arrived a veteran of the London TV-commercial industry and an animator on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. And Alex Kuperschmidt has been working as an artist at Walt Disney World for several years, including as an animator for a small animation group which has since been disbanded. The staff also includes artists "on loan" from the California studio for special projects, like Mark Kausler, whose past credits range from *Yellow Submarine* to early Ralph Bakshi features to *Daffy Duck's Quackbusters*; he put his experience from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *Tummy Trouble* to use during several months at the studio spent working as an animator and storyman on the studio's first theatrical cartoon, *Roller Coaster Rabbit*.

Much of the staff is made up of young artists new to the animation business, many of them graduates of Disney's California studio's internship program. Disney Animation Florida has also begun its own apprenticeship system, drawing on students from five art schools across the country, including CalArts and Sarasota, Florida's Ring-



Max Howard, Walt Disney Animation Florida's Director of Operations, watches animator Paul Curasi at the drawing board.

ling School of Art and Design. Ten to fifteen seniors and juniors participate in each training session, working independently at first, and eventually graduating to inbetweening and other production work on the studio's films. Some of the best artists who have completed the program are offered positions as assistants; some of the most promising assistants are being groomed to become animators on future projects. "They're all wildly talented as artists," says Brigitte Hartley of the students in the program, "It's great to have that around."

The facilities these artists work in are new, nicely-equipped and organized, and attractive. "Well, it's such a beautiful studio," Mark Kausler says. "It's just a great place to work, a beautiful environment." The studio, with a staff of about eighty, is small in comparison to the California Disney facilities, and compact enough that visitors can peer into each department from story to editing without tiring their feet. Mark Henn comments that "It's nice being in a smaller group like this, where everything is at your fingertips: Camera, editorial...everything is close at hand. Being a tight group like this, hopefully you'll have better communication, which is a major problem not just in animation, but in any business of this

size."

There is also the odd fact that, unlike any other animation artists in history, these ones work under the close inspection of hundreds of Florida tourists. (Not every nook and cranny of the studio is visible to guests, but neither are there great amounts of space that *aren't* apparent to them.) The studio is sound-proofed off from the visitor area, so sound isn't much of a problem, except for video monitors that continuously play the Walter Cronkite-Robin Williams loops. Some of the employees have taken to shielding these out with the help of Walkman-type tape players. Most artists adjust quickly to the faces watching them; their communications with visitors are mostly limited to a few funny signs taped to the window and the occasional suction cup-tipped dart shot at the glass.

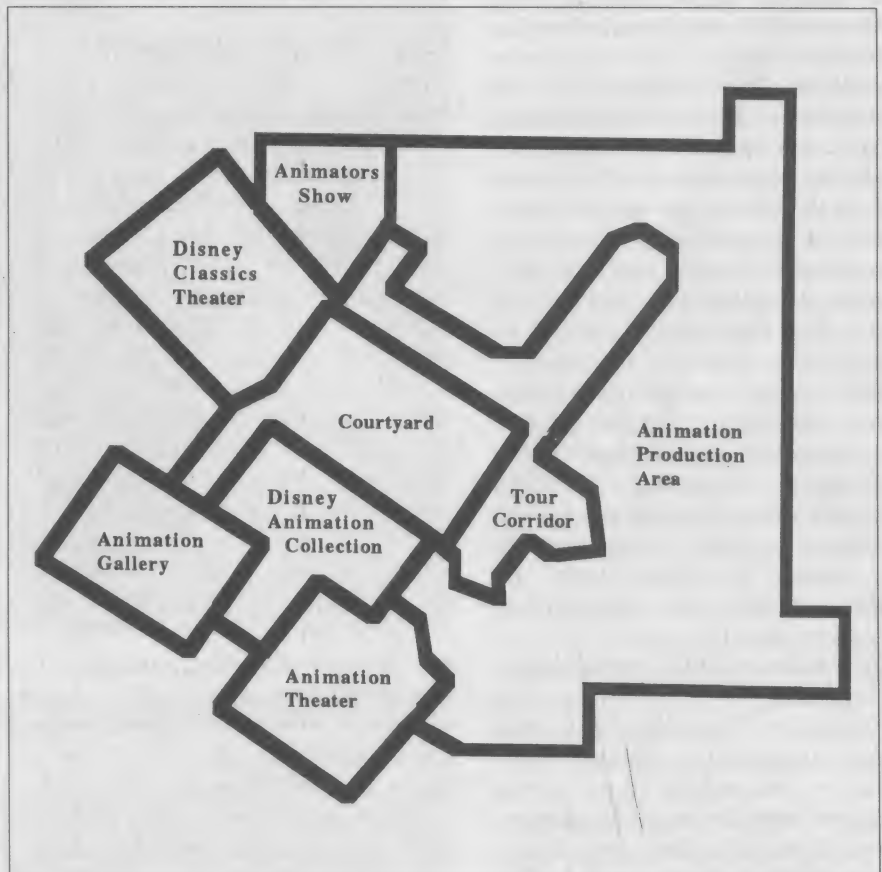
Having decided to operate a cartoon studio as part of the Disney-MGM Theme Park, Disney was faced with the question of what to do with the animation it produced. At first, the plans were for the studio to make theatrical featurettes starring Mickey Mouse and other classic Disney characters, some-

THE MAGIC OF DISNEY ANIMATION: A GUIDED TOUR

The first thing visitors to The Magic of Disney Animation lay their eyes upon when entering the attraction is an imposing case filled with thirteen of the Academy Awards the Disney studio has won for animated films over the decades. The case is the center of a small but impressive museum of Disney animation art and other memorabilia from the studio's origins to *The Little Mermaid*, the contents of which will change every six months.

The gallery also serves as a waiting area for *Back to Never Land*, a film starring Walter Cronkite and Robin Williams that introduces visitors to the basics of animated-film production. This film is a delight which, like the attraction as a whole, entertains and educates in equal parts. Williams gets changed into an animated character – one of the Lost Boys from *Peter Pan*, to be exact – as Cronkite briefly explains each step of the animation process. The film's animation, directed by Jerry Rees, is a nicely-done pastiche of the *Peter Pan* style. Williams is hilarious, and Cronkite is an agreeably avuncular host whose demeanor and voice bear a startling resemblance to those of another Walt who used to give similar presentations about Disney animation on TV. (*Back to Never Land* was, incidentally, produced outside the Disney studio by Bob Rogers.)

After the film is over, visitors enter the animation studio tour itself, which is conducted along a raised, glassed-in area from which each studio department can be viewed in sequence. The tour, accompanied by video monitors playing further Cronkite/Williams explanatory material, is almost unique among Disney theme park attractions in that it is self-guided; visitors are invited to stay as long as they wish and watch artists and other employees at work. Stops on the tour include story, animation, clean up, effects, backgrounds, photocopying process (aka Xerox), paint lab, ink and paint, camera, and editing. The studio is on a staggered work schedule, so that visitors will find employees at work during most of the park's open hours, including nights and weekends, al-



A simplified floor plan of The Magic of Disney Animation attraction and the Disney Animation Florida studio.

though animation and ink and paint are the only two departments in which workers are almost always visible. These are also the departments in which park guests are most likely to want to take their time: watching the artists laboring over animation and cels for films which won't be released for many months is fascinating, and like most animation studios, the place is filled with gag drawings, memorabilia, and other interesting clutter that's fun to take note of. (Animation fans are especially likely to want to linger in the place and take in the little details to be seen, like model sheets, copies of books on the work of Disney and other studios, and even, on one artist's desk, an inscribed sketch of Bugs Bunny by Chuck Jones.)

At the end of the touring area is a small theater area in which a video program featuring film clips and interviews with Disney animators is shown; like the art display, it also serves as a painless waiting

area, this time for a concluding film show of classic Disney animation clips in an adjacent theater. (As is common with such compilations, the film – which oddly ignores the short subjects almost entirely in favor of brief snippets of the animated features – is not terribly satisfying. It would be nice to see it replaced with a complete Disney short, which might change on a rotating basis.)

From there, visitors exit back into the Disney-MGM park, by way, if they choose, of an elegant shop which sells mementoes including books, posters, and greeting cards, authentic animation paper and pencils, and production art and limited-edition cels costing thousands of dollars. (Animation fans with long memories may grow nostalgic for the long-gone days when Disneyland's Art Corner sold choice cels from the 1950s features for a few dollars apiece.)

thing the studio had intended to do ever since the success of *Mickey's Christmas Carol* in 1983. Using Mickey and his crowd would serve another purpose: audiences are probably more interested in seeing artists at work on cartoons with famous characters than new ones they aren't familiar with.

The studio will be doing this: its second major project is a retelling of *The Prince and the Pauper* with Mickey in both title roles and many of his friends in the supporting cast. During the Summer of 1988, however, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* opened and caused a sensation, and suddenly Disney had its new star in decades who was perfectly suited to short-subject parts. And so Disney Animation Florida's first project for theatrical release became *Roller Coaster Rabbit*, a seven-minute Roger Rabbit cartoon which will reportedly open with Touchstone's *Dick Tracy* next Summer. One Roger short, *Tummy Trouble*, had already been produced in California, with some ink-and-paint work done in the Florida studio; both it and *Roller Coaster Rabbit* were directed by Rob Minkoff.

Roller Coaster Rabbit's story was conceived and storyboarded in California, along with *Tummy Trouble* and three other Roger stories which may be animated in the future: *Hare in My Soup*, *Pressed and Impressed*, and *Beach Blanket Bunny*. (The animation tour's story room, incidentally, is the one area that is at this time a mock-up rather than a real, operating facility; *The Prince and the Pauper* was also storyboarded in Burbank.)

The cartoon takes Roger, along with Baby Herman and his mother, to a county fair, the atmosphere of which Mark Kausler compares to the animated sequences of Disney's *So Dear to My Heart*. As in *Somethin's Cookin'* (the Roger short that opened *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*) and *Tummy Trouble*, the storyline concerns Roger's hapless attempts to save Herman and himself from perilous situations, of which the fair proves an extremely rich source. Roger pursues the baby through a dart game and shooting gallery, around a ferris wheel (in a scene that may not make it into the final film), and into the bullpen home of a bull who resembles a more belligerent cousin of Disney's version of Ferdinand. The climactic scene comes when Roger and Herman find their way onto the title's roller coaster, which is computer animated à la the clockwork

scene in *The Great Mouse Detective*; and as in *Tummy Trouble*, there is a surprise ending incorporating live-action footage. (During the cartoon, Jessica Rabbit makes a cameo as the operator of an understandably-popular kissing booth.)

Like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit's* animation and *Tummy Trouble*, *Roller Coaster Rabbit* is done in the style of the mythical Maroon Cartoons studio, which Alex Kuperschmidt describes as "taking the best of American cartoon forms and combining them all in one...a hybrid of of Tex Avery's sensibility with a Disney quality." Avery's influence is felt in the visual style – the look somewhat resembles that of his early films for MGM – but most importantly in the films' gags. Every time Roger Rabbit does a take, it's a loving tribute to Tex Avery and his importance in the history of American animation.

But Kausler says that the exaggerated gags are "the only thing that's survived from the forties. Everything else is like a feature; Roger is really a feature character. Not just a crazy little character like Droopy or the buzzards in *What's Buzzin' Buzzard* [Tex Avery, 1943], which he somewhat resembles. He's got a little more depth to him than that." (Although Brigitte Hartley, whose work on *Roller Coaster Rabbit* focused on Baby

Herman, laughs that she "worked on Roger in the film [*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*], but he's become too wacky. I can't keep up with him.")

The production process on the short, too, bears little resemblance to the traditional cartoon-making system, in which budgets were tight and the story was planned down to the last detail before animation began. Mark Kausler estimates that only one out of every four animation drawings done for *Tummy Trouble* ended up on the screen, and suspects the ratio on *Roller Coaster Rabbit* to be similar. "It's much more of a live-action approach," he says. "They think in terms of shooting ratios, how much stuff can be done over, rewrites at the last minute, just like in live-action filmmaking."

Mark Henn agrees, and notes Walt Disney Studios' Chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg's influence on how Disney animation is produced in both California and Florida. "It's a kind of a hybrid of live-action and the way Disney used to make films. Knowing that in one sense nothing is ever locked, and there's always room for improvement, but with this hurry-up, we've-got-to-get-it-done-yesterday kind of pace. In a lot of ways, it's good, because you don't have to wait four or five years to see your finished work. You don't spend so much time

The ink-and-paint department at work, with visitors looking on from above. Note the corner of a reference cel of King Triton from The Little Mermaid peeking out from behind the Mickey one.





And that's the way animation is: Walter Cronkite and friend (Robin Williams in cartoon form), as they appear in *Back to Never Land*, a short film presented to studio visitors.

on it that you lose your objectivity."

The work pace is much brisker on the Roger cartoons and new features than the leisurely gait that Disney animation had settled into in the 1960s and 1970s, but in many ways the attention to detail on *Roller Coaster Rabbit* is exceptionally high. (The Roger shorts are by far the most expensive short cartoons ever produced.) Mark Kausler: "Everything is on a higher level. The cleanup is a lot more refined; they don't just take the animators' drawings and Xerox them. It goes through a whole different stage: the cleanup people have to make it very, very precise, and add all the little things — like his pants cuffs falling through, what happens to his ears and hair, the amount of delay on every part of his body. Essentially, you're using two sets of animators for every scene."

This painstaking work pays off: while the animation is filmed using the Xerox camera, which usually results in a rougher line quality, *Roller Coaster Rabbit* has a slick, hand-inked look straight out of the 1940s.

While much of what's new about the approach to production taken on the cartoon is also taking place on the Disney animation features, there are some notable differences. On the features, animators are typically "cast," with each animator spending most of his or her time on a particular character's or characters' appearances throughout the movie. Animation on the Roger

Rabbit cartoons, however, is assigned primarily by scene, with each animator being responsible for a scene and all the characters in it.

Mark Henn draws some further contrasts between animating on a Roger short and his work on the features: "It's a very different style of animation. It's very broad; it's very action-oriented, very fast-paced. It's kind of as if you were taking a very well-known dramatic actor and putting him in a comedy role, or vice-versa. It's putting on a slightly different hat for me, which is good; I like the challenge of doing something different."

"It differs from the other studio in that our organization is a little primitive, compared with California," notes Kausler. "We're still developing, and we don't really have a smooth, efficient way to work, because we haven't done enough pictures yet. I think when we get more production in, we'll finally get it up to speed where everybody's comfortable. Right now we're going in fits and starts." (At this time, the Orlando studio's work must be approved in Burbank, necessitating plane trips back and forth for the directors and a certain amount of further delay.)

Chances are that the studio will get the opportunity to achieve the development Kausler refers to:

attendance figures at Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park are said to have surpassed even the company's immodest expectations, and that The Magic of Disney Animation attraction and Disney Animation Florida will be around for many years to come seems assured. Exactly what the studio will be doing is harder to say. There are as of yet no long-term plans (no public ones, anyway), and what projects the studio gets is likely to depend on what needs doing at any given time.

The immediate future, after *Roller Coaster Rabbit* and *The Prince and the Pauper*, will probably include more featurettes starring Mickey and the gang, and perhaps more Roger Rabbit cartoons, if Disney and Spielberg choose to continue their collaboration on the character. As the need arises for commercials and other special projects involving Disney characters, they may be done there as well; a McDonald's ad featuring characters from *The Little Mermaid* was the first job completed at the studio.

There may also be some work on feature films: the studio has already helped out on the the ink-and-paint for *The Little Mermaid* (and received its own set of credits in the film for doing so). Mark Henn will be doing some animation from Florida on *The Rescuers Down Under*, in addition to his work on *The Prince and the Pauper*, and studio officials have reportedly considered using the Florida studio as a unit on upcoming features.

The ultimate project for the studio, of course, would be a feature film of its very own. Such a task would require major expansions of both the staff and the studio facilities, neither of which is currently planned. Mark Henn, for one, would like to see it happen, and calls it his long-term goal.

A Disney animated feature produced entirely in a state other than California is an odd thought, but no odder than the mere idea of a Disney studio outside of that state would have been a few years ago. Florida won't even be the only home of a satellite Disney cartoon studio: the company recently announced plans for a second Disney-MGM park at Euro Disneyland outside of Paris, which will also have its own animation facility.

Whatever the future holds, there will be a lot of cartoon fans watching with interest what goes on at Walt Disney Animation Florida. And possibly ducking a well-aimed plastic dart shot in their direction.

KOKO KOMMENTS

A FLEISCHER STUDIOS COLUMN BY G. MICHAEL DOBBS

THE MAKING OF GULLIVER'S TRAVELS



A model-sheet drawing of Gulliver.

As many film fans have been hearing throughout this year, 1939, fifty years ago, stands out as perhaps the *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, and many other classic films were released during that year. So far though this year, no film magazine has bothered to look at one of that year's top money-making attractions; a historic film that, although flawed, still can please an audience today....the second sound animated feature cartoon, *Gulliver's Travels*.

Max Fleischer's film's place in animation history has been affected by its contemporary reviewers, who believed the film was inferior simply because it wasn't produced by Disney, and that its feature length was an effort to cash in on Disney's success with *Snow White* in 1937. The film's reputation wasn't helped either when the Fleischer Studio ceased to exist in 1942 and Paramount sold the rights to the film to National Telefilm Associates, which allowed the property to slip into the public domain.

Most people who have seen the film have watched a second or third-generation 16mm dupe or a poorly-done video transfer of one of these inferior prints. Now Republic Home Video, through its Spotlight label, has released *Gulliver's*

Travels in the form it should be viewed as...a sparkling new Technicolor print. After 50 years, perhaps it's time to give *Gulliver's Travels* a second look.

1937 was not a good year at the Fleischer Studios. On the evening of May 6th about 100 employees at the studio voted to strike. Max Fleischer had refused to grant union recognition, improve working conditions, raise wages, and grant vacations with pay. At the time, the studio employed about 170 people, and only the animators had contracts that spelled out the conditions of their employment. The people who did much of the factory-like work of animation, the inking and painting, were paid salaries as low as \$15.00 a week.

Fleischer had prided himself on never having laid off a single person through the Depression and considered himself a benevolent employer.

"He was like the 'Godfather,'" recalled Jack Mercer, the voice of Popeye. "If you had a problem, you'd go see Max." Despite his frequent generosity and a

low-key personality, Max had adopted a typical Victorian Era attitude toward his employees. His company was a family and they were like his children. Children do not unionize.

If this was not enough trouble, Fleischer and his studio watched the Walt Disney Studio with great interest. Disney had invested everything he had in what some film industry insiders considered a great risk, a feature-length cartoon. Fleischer had experimented, with great success, the previous year with a two-reel special Popeye cartoon for the Christmas season. *Popeye Meets Sinbad the Sailor* had gorgeous color, effective use of the Fleischer 3-D sets and a marvelous script. Exhibitors and audiences loved it, and the studio was preparing another two-reeler for Christmas of 1937. Disney, though, had an 83-minute feature, and Fleischer, his staff and the rest of the film industry wanted to see if audiences would accept an even longer cartoon.

Snow White was released nationally in

February of 1938, and its huge success prompted an announcement from Paramount Pictures. Paramount, Fleischer's distributor, said that Max would be producing a feature for them. They would be fronting some of the production money for Max and also would help Max build a brand-new studio near Miami, Florida. Fleischer had settled the strike in October, and had decided to move his operations from New York to Florida. The Fleischers had vacationed there, and the warm climates, generous local tax incentives, and lack of union activity appealed to Max.

So the studio's plate was quite full. Max had to produce his studio's first feature-length cartoon, move the operation from New York to Florida into a new studio he was helping to design, and maintain the studio's commitment of short subjects. Disney worked on *Snow White* for five years. Paramount had given Max a release date of Christmas 1939. (During the same period, Universal announced that Walter Lantz would be making his feature debut with an adaptation of *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp*. This feature apparently never made it past pre-production.)

Max signed the contract with Paramount to produce *Gulliver's Travels* in June. Like Disney, the Fleischer brothers had chosen a "pre-sold" property that had a certain amount of name recognition. How Jonathan Swift's sometimes bleakly-satirical novel would be adapted into a family feature was another problem. There were several different scripts, some of which had Popeye playing Gulliver. According to publicity materials, Dave Fleischer had wanted a light Gilbert and Sullivan-style operetta, while Max wanted something closer to Swift.

The final script was publicized as a compromise. The cartoon would have a surplus of music and would have the war between Lilliput and Blefuscu not over which end of a hard-boiled egg to open, but over their national anthems. If Max's intentions were to actually convey some of Swift's satiric rage, this script was scarcely a compromise. There is little of Swift in Fleischer's *Gulliver's Travels*.

Fleischer hired the song-writing team of Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin, who had won the Best Song Oscar in 1938 for "Thanks for the Memory" to write the songs for the feature, while acclaimed movie composer Victor Young was retained for the film's score. Even

resident tunesmith Sammy Timburg, whose usual chores were composing and scoring the studio's shorts, got to write a song.

The studio then did something which raised a few eyebrows in the film industry. The voice actors seldom got credit for their contributions to cartoons and were often fairly anonymous radio actors. The Fleischers signed up two of the nation's most popular radio singing stars, Lanny Ross and Jessica Dragonette, to perform the songs sung by the Prince and Princess in the movie. This was the first time any "name" personality had been recruited to do voice work in cartoons.

Lanny Ross recalled to me his experience working on the movie. He had known Max, since they lived in the same building, and had accepted the job like any other.

"I was told the Prince was very small, and I thought I should do something to make my voice sound small. So, I stood on my knees in the recording studio," he said. He really didn't receive any direction on how to perform, and his contact with the production was minimal. The publicity value, though, of having established performers involved with the movie was considerable.

Pinto Colvig, who had done considerable work at the Disney Studio, including creating the voice of Goofy, was recruited to do the voice of Gabby, the town crier who discovers Gulliver on the beach. Jack Mercer performed the voice of King Little of Lilliput, while Miami

radio personality Sam Parker did the voice of Gulliver and performed the rotoscoped actions as well.

By March of 1939, *Gulliver's Travels* had been laid out, and the studio began hiring additional animators to help with the work load. A half-million drawings were required to produce the movie, besides the work necessary to produce the studio's short subjects. Studio veteran Myron Waldman remembers the Fleischers were in a mad rush to hire people, some of whom were not qualified as animators. This influx of talent, primarily from the California animation studios, created tension in the studio.

"Many of the people who came from the [west] coast thought they were better than us," explained Waldman. The studio was still divided because of the strike, and the new additions to the staff didn't help.

John Walworth was one of those new additions. Walworth was working at MGM when he was hired away to work on the film. He worked with Joe Oriolo, who felt insulted that he had to animate some of the many crowd scenes in *Gulliver's Travels*.

"Joe sub-contracted some of these scenes to me to do under the table," said Walworth with a laugh. "So I did them along with my other work."

The recruitment of animators brought two former Fleischer animators back to the studio. Both Grim Natwick and Shamus Culhane had done considerable work at the Disney Studio, and now accepted Max's offer to work on

Among the Gulliver products licensed by Paramount was this Valentine card (with a 1939 copyright but presumably intended for Valentine's Day, 1940); note the misspelled "Gabby."



Gulliver. Culhane was given crowd scenes to animate upon his arrival.

"Mob shots. I came in right at the end of the picture and they had a whole mess of them waiting for the very end of the job. I got things like the whole crowd is waving at Gulliver as he leaves. Jesus Christ! After being a specialist working on *Snow White* I get stuck with this junk to do. But because of my background by that time I could do it very well, but it was a pain in the ass. I hadn't done that kind of thing since I started at Walt's," remembered Culhane.

Natwick noted the casual atmosphere of the studio. He was given Dave Fleischer's office to use while directing his 1,000 feet of *Gulliver*. Natwick offered his assessment of the differences between Fleischer and Disney.

"They were two different people. Disney was a Yankee, coming from several generations of Americans. I believe Fleischer was probably the first generation...And they [the Fleischers] were American in every sense of the word. Disney had this in-bred thing that he didn't have to think about doing something, but the Fleischers did. They accepted exactly as it was in the society in which they lived. And they grew up in the Jazz Age, and their cartoons are jazz cartoons...

"Disney had an aristocratic studio. Actually at Fleischer's I never had a room of my own. There were one or two or three big rooms with one desk sitting behind another. But at Disney, we had private rooms, and they had a little buffet service. If you wanted a drink of pop or something or an apple to eat, you could phone the girl downstairs and it would be brought up, by errand boy," Natwick said.

Gulliver's Travels adapted an unusual style in its animation, as all of Gulliver's movements were rotoscoped while those of the small inhabitants of Lilliput and Blefuscu were not. One wonders if the rotoscoping of Gulliver was an artistic way to separate Gulliver from his little friends, or an effort to provide inexperienced animators with some help.

The quality of the animation varies greatly. Some of it seems rushed, while other scenes are very good. Myron Waldman attributes this uneven quality to the number of new animators plus the near-impossible schedule. Some of the new animators were amazed the studio didn't do extensive pencil tests as did Disney, and there was only one Movieola to view rushes. Critics of the studio have

chalked up the lack of pencil tests to Fleischer Studio "crudeness." Certainly Max may not have thought pencil tests were necessary (although one *Gulliver* pencil test is reportedly in the collection of a former Fleischer animator), but perhaps the schedule dictated by Para-

television industry was making in cities such as New York, Fleischer and Paramount took the unusual step of offering for sale the television and radio rights to the picture. Clearly they were confident it would be as much of a success as *Snow White*. In a huge ad in the June

Assorted drawings from Gulliver's Travels model sheets.



mount just didn't allow it.

While the movie was being animated, Max was working with Paramount's Harry Royster on the merchandising of *Gulliver's Travels*. Myron Waldman explains that he had gone to Max once and asked why the studio didn't merchandise Betty Boop more. "He said to me, 'This is an animated cartoon studio, not a toy factory.' He didn't want to get into it then," said Waldman.

Perhaps Fleischer had seen the enormous success of the Disney merchandising and had decided he too wanted to jump on that band wagon. The Betty Boop material had been minimal, and Fleischer did not have the merchandising rights to Popeye. With the move to Miami impending, Mae Questel decided to stay in New York, which helped to kill the Boop series. With Betty Boop gone, Fleischer pinned his merchandising hopes to *Gulliver*. Paramount's new licensing department arranged for 65 different products including dolls, coloring books, a Big Little book, and pajamas, among other products.

With the splash the newly-established

14th, 1939 edition of *Variety*, Paramount trumpeted "The Biggest News of the Screen Year! A Full-Length Feature Cartoon Completely Filmed in Color!" With most movies in black and white and with only one other color feature-length cartoon existing, this announcement was indeed special.

By August, both the new studio in Florida and the feature were reaching completion. The budget had gone over the expected \$900,000 mark and was to reach approximately \$1.5 million. The Miami press welcomed the new studio as Florida had often attempted to become the "Hollywood of the East," and the studio was the subject of a number of stories when it premiered on October 9, 1939.

In the next column, we'll follow Gulliver's Travels through its premiere, look at the film's strengths and weaknesses, and find out how the experience affected the second Fleischer feature. As always, I enjoy hearing from animation fans. Write me at 24 Hampden St., Indian Orchard, Ma 01151.

FLIPBOOKS

A Book Column by David Bastian

REVIEWS OF SIX – COUNT 'EM, SIX – BOOKS (AND ONE MAGAZINE)

The Art of Who Framed Roger Rabbit
Sotheby's; \$15.00

The biggest mistake of 1988 may have been the failure on the part of the Walt Disney Company to publish a scrapbook on the making of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* to accompany the movie. In lieu of such a souvenir, the people at Sotheby's offer a beautiful catalog from their June 1989 auction of cels from the film.

Sotheby's, along with Christie's, is chiefly responsible for the recent price-hikes in animation art, which climaxed this past May with the record-breaking price of \$286,000 forked over for a 1934 black-and-white cel of Donald Duck getting punched at the "Orphan's Benefit." (But that's another story.)

Roger Rabbit, not even one year old, took in amounts from \$900 to \$50,000 per cel. Never fear, though; for only \$15.00 you can own them all. Oh sure, they are a little smaller than the genuine articles, but they're reproduced amazingly well. The colors are as bright as in any of the Disney bibles, and the choice of poses will be interesting and surprising to animators and fans alike. Each cel was sold with a frame enlargement of the accompanying live action, making each image in the book more complete than the usual cel

catalog's mixed bag of heads-without-bodies-or-various-limbs. Hell, there's even a flip-book in the lower corner.

In addition to reacquainting me with the movie, the catalog makers several things evident:

1. Without Industrial Light and Magic's shadow-enhancement effects, the characters appear as flat atop their photostats as in (ahem) that particular Disney film *Roger* was trying to outdo.

2. Richard Williams couldn't draw a Warner Bros. character to save his life.

3. The notion that artwork from a film can be pawned off on the public, in addition to anything the film itself earns at the box office, may be the last carrot necessary to lead us into a rebirth of theatrical animation.

The only thing better than this would be an illustrated script of the film (how about it, Disney?). But I can't imagine that containing more artwork than this.

The Art of Who Framed Roger Rabbit is available at The Disney Store locations and some bookstores. If purchasing through the mail, send \$21.00 to: Sotheby's Catalogue Department, PO Box 5290, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150.

The Best of Disney

By Neil Sinyard; Twin/Portland House;

\$14.95

Another beautifully-illustrated (if too short – less than 200 pages) Disney book that reached the discount bins less than a year after it first appeared. Mr. Sinyard has sporadic flashes of insight. His analysis of the virtues and shortcomings of such usually-undiscussed films as *The Aristocats*, *The Rescuers*, and *The Fox and the Hound* are the most thorough I have yet encountered. And he also covers other recent projects like *Mickey's Christmas Carol* and *The Black Cauldron*.

But given the superficial angle of the book, which is to touch only on Disney's greatest hits (a highly debatable subject), especially in a year that gave us more candid and uncensored accounts of Disney the Man by Jack Kinney and Bill Peet, Mr. Sinyard's book appears to have nothing new to add.

Collectors are cautioned to peruse before buying. Still, at its reduced price, this book is a worthy supplement to the Disney library.

Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies: a Complete Illustrated Guide to the Warner Bros. Cartoons

By Jerry Beck and Will Friedwald; Henry Holt; \$14.95

Warnermania continues with the pub-

lication of this revised and updated edition of the authors' *The Warner Bros. Cartoons* (Scarecrow Press). In the introduction, the authors confess, "Yes, we have watched every cartoon listed in this book – and it has been a labor of love." All I can say is: it's bigger! It's now illustrated! Additions have been made! Mistakes have been corrected! Not only does it contain synopses of every Warner cartoon ever produced up to 1988's *Night of the Living Duck*, it also includes listings of all the TV specials that either contained hacked-up shorts (like *How Bugs Bunny Won the West*) or new footage (*Carnival of the Animals*), and a list of the feature-length compilations (*The Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Movie*, etc.) and the shorts they contained.

There is also a complete episode guide for the first two seasons (1960-1962) of the original *Bugs Bunny Show*, detailing the shorts used and the new footage created specifically for the show (much of which appears, from the descriptions, not to have been seen in over 27 years). Furthermore, there is a plot outline for Friz Freleng's 1963 sitcom pilot *Philbert*, which was directed by Richard Donner.

The release of the book coincided with a Warner retrospective at New York's Film Forum this past April, during which a lucky audience got to see many rarely-shown Warner projects, including *Philbert*. Beck and Friedwald were on hand to autograph copies of their "labor of love."

It goes without saying that the book is a must-have reference work for any Warner fan. But that's not to say that you should toss your old copy of the same two palookas' *The Warner Brothers Cartoons* out! They pretty much play it straight in the new book, which means many of their comments, opinions, and subjective ratings have been toned down to create less of an underground "fanzine" feel, and more of a respectable "desk reference" one. (This includes the deletion of all references to the now-defunct *Mindrot* magazine.)

But I suppose that's okay. After all, ever since last November, Bugs Bunny has had his own bible (Steve Schneider's *That's All Folks!*). And that makes him art...right?

"That's Not All Folks!" A Primer in Cartoon Knowledge

Edited by Jayne Pilling; British Film Institute; \$2.50

Not to be confused with Mel Blanc's memoirs, this 40-page collection of essays on Warner Bros. and other classic Hollywood animation was put out in 1984 to coincide with a series of screenings in England. It only recently came to my attention, and is worthy of belated mention because it brings together some of the best writers on the subject of Bugs and friends.

Five of the ten articles it contains are reprinted from the remarkable "Animation Issue" of *Film Comment* (January-February 1975). Among these are Richard Thompson's analysis of *Duck Amuck*, and interviews with Chuck Jones, Michael Maltese, Maurice Noble (!), and Joe Adamson's interview with Tex Avery which served as the foundation for his eventual book. (These interviews have all been heavily edited from their original length, and should not be considered a substitute for an honest-to-gosh copy of the 1975 *Film Comment*, if you are lucky enough to find one.)

Reprinted but rare is "Cartoon as Ritual," from a 1978 issue of *Cinema Texas*, a University of Texas film journal, which takes a look at the days when a cartoon short accompanied every feature film. And finally, there are two articles by Greg Ford unique to this dossier: "Tex Avery: Arch Radicaliser" and Ford's introduction to Chuck Jones.

Due the scarcity of the original sources of these articles, and in light of the insights they add to Warner history, *That's Not All Folks!* is recommended reading. Copies are available from the British Film Institute, 127 Charing Cross Rd., London, WC2. The cost is \$2.50 plus \$1.50 postage.

Afterimage #13, Autumn 1987: "Animating the Fantastic"

Simon Field, editor; £2.95 (\$5.50)

U.S. audiences are at last getting the opportunity to become familiar with the work of Jan Svankmajer, thanks largely to the recent U.S. screenings of his feature-length film *Alice* and a travelling program of his animated shorts. Likewise, a tetralogy by the Brothers Quay has been making the art film-house rounds.

The emergence of these filmmakers has given rise to a series of descriptive words until now not usually associated with animation: words like "alchemy," "metaphysical," and "surrealist."

Now it's true that the early "trick-film" animators like J. Stuart Blackton were known as "magicians of the mov-

ies." But a magician was somebody who dealt in illusions, mechanical tricks of the eye. To be an "alchemist" is to be a conjurer of an illusion the origins of which are its own. The objects (puppets, stones, earth) in Svankmajer's films seem not to have been manipulated, but rather incited to live.

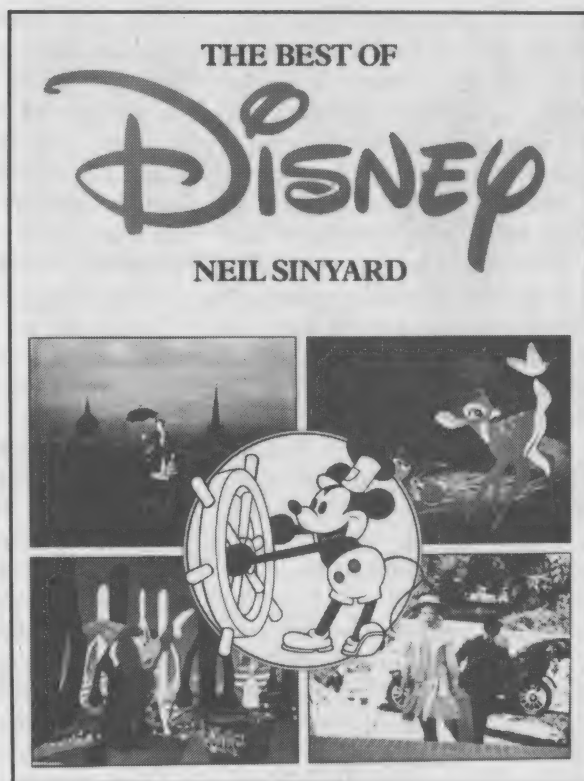
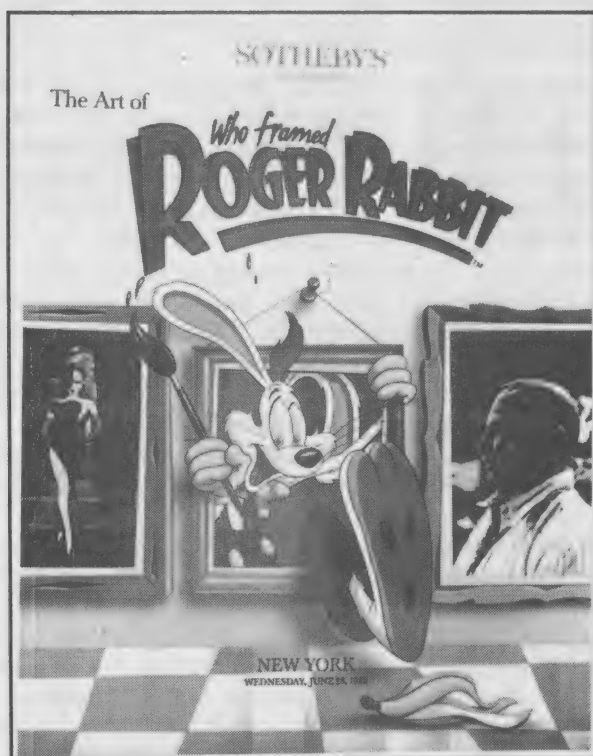
Afterimage is a British journal of critical writings on independent and experimental cinema which has an erratic publishing schedule. The Autumn 1987 issue, which only recently reached the U.S., is devoted to animation's "alchemists of the surreal."

Coinciding with the appearance of Jan Svankmajer's films in the U.S., a fine-art exhibition entitled "Prague in 1600: Art and Culture at the Court of Rudolf II" circulated through Europe last Winter. Rudolf II (1552-1612) is alleged to have been one of history's greatest connoisseurs of the arts. Included in the collection was Giuseppe Arcimboldo's portrait of him in terms of fruits and vegetables, which more than 300 years later influenced the "composite heads" sequence of Svankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialogue*, a Grand Prix winner at Annecy '83. Rudolf II was also supposedly a supporter of the furthering of science (no matter how black), resulting in Prague being dubbed the "Capital of Magic." All of which is quite a heritage for a Czech animator to draw from.

The first half of the journal explores Svankmajer's career by way of several critical articles, one penned by Vratislav Effenberger, a fellow Czech surrealist animator. Also included are three scenarios by Svankmajer and a complete bibliography.

Svankmajer fields questions in an extensive interview that is very helpful in revealing his influences and his views on animation's place in the arts. The reader also gains some insight into the Czech film scene and the difficulties of attempting to be an artist in that country. The tag "Militant Surrealist," which has been unfairly foisted upon Svankmajer as a pat summation of his approach to filmmaking, is an out-of-context quote lifted from this interview. And it's worth reading the interview in order to understand how this term was coined.

The essays in the second half of the journal examine some of animation's other alchemists: the Brothers Quay, whose *Street of Crocodiles* won the Grand Prix at Zagreb in '86; Patrick



Bokanowski, who spent five years creating the experimental *L'Ange*; Feliks Kuczkowski, one of Poland's first animators; Walerian Borowczyk, who is perhaps our most underappreciated animator despite an impressive body of collage and cut-out films, one of which is feature-length; and finally, the Soviet animators Andrei Khrzhanovsky and Yuri Norstein, who visited the U.S. with his films in 1987 and whose *Tale of Tales* won the title of "Best Animation of All Time" at ASIFA-Hollywood's bombastic "Olympiad of Animation" in the Summer of 1984.

As is evident by this list of names, awards and acclaim do not guarantee wide visibility. The work of most of these animators is still unknown to American audiences. And until this issue of *Afterimage*, little had been written about them. As more Americans get the chance to see these films, that will change. It is the hope of the editors of *Afterimage* that the issue's essays and other features will "inform these viewings."

The journal is available from *Afterimage*, 20 Landrock Rd., London N8 9HL. The cost is £2.95 (about \$5.50). I imagine they would prefer a check drawn in pounds sterling.

Above and next page: some of the books reviewed in this installment of "Flipbooks."

Animation Techniques

By Roger Noake; Chartwell Books; \$19.95

This latest "how-to" book was first published in England last year under the title *Animation: a Guide to Animated Film Techniques*, but except for the truncated title (we Americans are so impatient), the two versions are identical. The latest in a long line of instructional manuals that all end up being inadequate in some way, *Animation Techniques* will disappoint the student of animation who is looking to be spoonfed a very methodical series of step-by-step instructions. Alas, I'm becoming increasingly convinced that only a mentor-in-the-flesh will ever be able to fill that role.

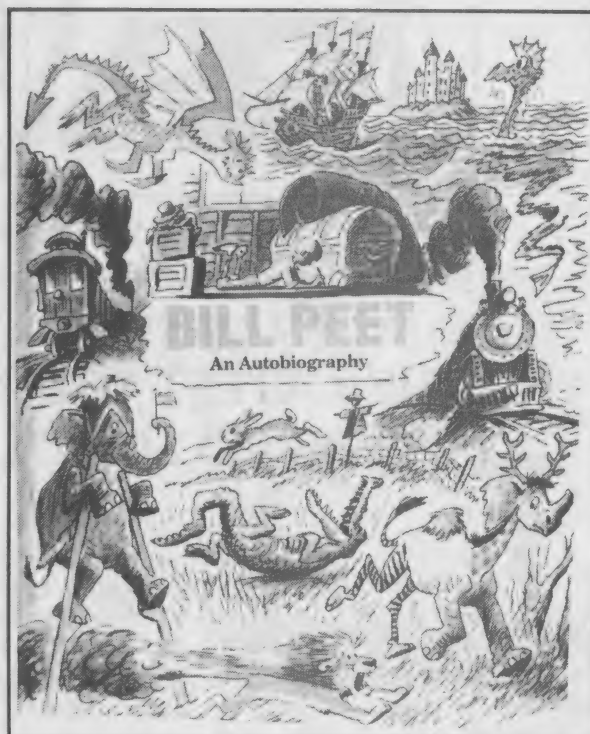
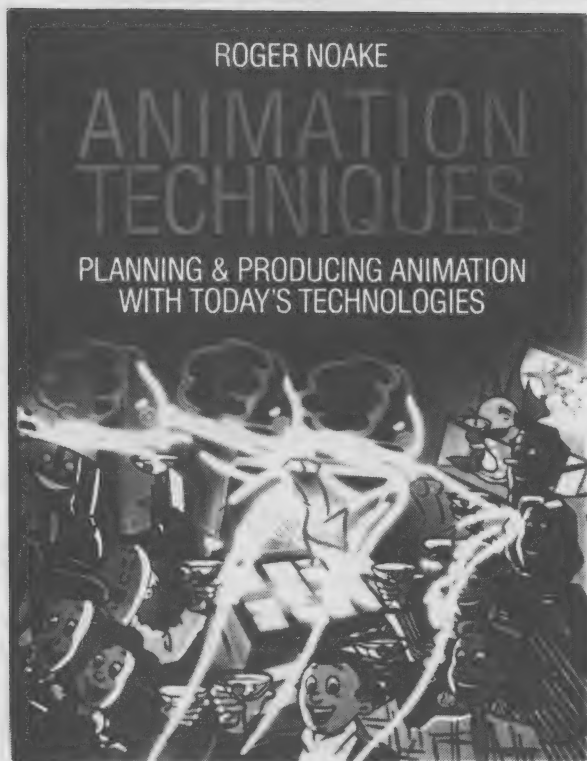
But for those willing to jump in head-first, this book does offer some inspirations in the form of its illustrations. Never have I seen such a lavish display of international animation art in one book (John Halas, eat your heart out). If this were a history book, it would be welcomed wholeheartedly, so I see no reason to condemn it just because it may not transform you into a filmmaker. Everything from Winsor McCay to Pixar is represented here, with Bakshi, Len Lye, Chuck Jones, Oskar Fischinger, Terry Gilliam, Alexander Alexeieff, Bruno Bozzetto, Bob Godfrey, Paul Driessen, the Brothers Quay, Caroline Leaf, and even Don Bluth

covered along the way! There are stills from Zagreb films, NFBC films, Chinese animation, Hungarian films, music videos, commercials, and computer-animated films, and practically every one is in color.

Each film still is employed to illustrate a specific problem of animation, including "Storyboarding," "Staging the Action," and "Sound and Image." (The importance of "Layouts" is very effectively conveyed through illustrations from the making of a "Mr. Sheen" tile-cleaner commercial.)

Often the illustrations are used not to explain the techniques of animation, but its aesthetics. For example, Yuri Norstein "uses the frame not to propel the narrative forward by providing suspense, but to create meaning. In *Tale of Tales*, form and content combine to make a statement about memory."

Whereas Shamus Culhane tried to imbue *Animation From Script to Screen* with paternal guidance, Noake brings together a potpourri of examples and styles that will show not on how "thought-out" each stage of production must be, but also that there are infinite ways to resolve the problems of each stage. This book does not contain all the information you'll need to make a film, but it does contain information you won't find elsewhere. And the panorama of film stills alone makes it worth leafing through.



Bill Peet: an Autobiography

By Bill Peet; Houghton Mifflin Co.; \$16.95

Disney storyman Bill Peet has thrown animation fans a curve. His autobiography, which is as much an account of life at the Disney studio during the 1940s and 1950s as it is the story of a boy who loved to draw, is hiding out in book stores in the children's section! But even though it was written for kids aged 8 to 12 (especially those kids who have ever felt different from their peers because they like to draw), there is a wealth of information on the Disney animation process and Walt himself that no fan will want to be without. As you read it, you will become a kid again.

As was typical with many of the animators from the golden age who had never dreamed of a career in animation, Peet was forced by the Depression to apply for work at Disney. We can get an indication of how populous the studio had become by the late 1930s when Peet tells us that he was employed for a whole month before he caught his first glimpse of Mr. Disney himself. (He finally saw him at the *Snow White* premiere!)

Peet started as an inbetweeners, but just as he was getting frustrated with ducks and mice, he was accepted in the story department, where he gradually went from sketch artist (on *Pinocchio*) to screenwriter (*101 Dalmations*, *The Sword in*

the Stone). Along the way, he developed such characters as Jaq and Gus, the *Cinderella* mice, and the demons who served as Maleficent's henchmen in *Sleeping Beauty*.

By the time he left the studio, one year before Disney's death, he had already begun his second career as a writer and illustrator of children's books. The Disney shorts *Lambert the Sheepish Lion*, *Goliath II*, and *Susie the Little Blue Coupe* were all born as ideas for possible Peet books.

One hundred of the book's 190 pages are devoted to his days at Disney, though to assume from this that he considers his 27 years there the best of his life would be wide of the mark. Indeed, Peet appears to have always been looking to get out, but was continually enticed to stay on longer by an interesting project or an increase in creative responsibility. The overall tone of these pages is not one of creative bliss, but of frustration. The first work he did for *Pinocchio* was tossed when Walt decided to drop the entire scene from the film. At the film's premiere he was shocked to discover that his name was not listed in the credits. He quickly learned that a promotion from sketch artist to bonafide storyman did not necessarily mean that he wouldn't be demoted the next week.

There are many "story session" tales in the book, in which Walt is presented as moody and unpredictable. According to

Peet, there was the "grumpy, bearish Walt and the jovial, good-natured one, and you could never be sure which Walt to expect." These encounters echo the sentiments expressed in Jack Kinney's *Walt Disney and Assorted Other Characters*. Indeed, the two books make good companions.

Peet makes no apologies for the fact that his post-Disney career as a children's book author means the most to him. Why else would he choose to write his memoirs in the format in which he feels happiest? Still, it is obvious that if his drawing style made him an ideal storyboard artist for Disney, his experience with Disney in turn influenced his storytelling style. Catherine Schine, in reviewing this book for *The New York Times Book Review*, said Peet's pictures "are narrative pictures, appearing on every page, often spanning two, and full of movement and direction — his characters are always going somewhere." And "Mr. Peet's pictures move horizontally, almost leaning in their eagerness to see what comes next."

Peet compares many of the characters in his books with himself at different stages of his life, and with people he has known (including Walt Disney). Not only is this book a good insider's view of what it was like to work with Disney, it is the best book you can give a child who likes to draw. I wish I had had it when I was a kid.

TAPES ON TAPE

A VIDEO COLUMN BY MATTHEW HASSON

THE LATEST WARNER BROS. CARTOON, AND SOME OF THE OLDEST

Daffy Duck's Quackbusters (1988)

Warner Home Video; \$19.95

Daffy Duck's Quackbusters is an interesting new compilation film which had a limited theatrical release last year before going to videotape and cable. The tired old technique of taking a bunch of classic Warner Bros. cartoons and attempting to tie them together into a cohesive storyline has been done several times before, with prime-time TV specials and feature films such as *1001 Rabbit Tales*. *Quackbusters* manages to rise above its predecessors and give us some rather well-animated linking segments directed by Greg Ford and Terry Lennon.

The plot, however — a spoof of *Ghostbusters* — came about four years too late to cash in on the original *Ghostbusters* craze. It's no small coincidence that this tape should come out hot on the heels of *Ghostbusters II*, seeming a little more relevant. But even if you're sick and tired of *Ghostbusters* (as I am), *Quackbusters* should still be seen, as it gives us a look at the shape of Warner cartoons to come under the directorship of Messrs. Ford and Lennon.

A lot of effort has been spent to make smooth transitions from classic cartoons to the modern storyline, and it comes off quite well. The only area in which it falls short is in Mel Blanc's voice work. He may have been "the man of 1,000 voices," but in later years his versatility diminished a bit, and some of his voices began to sound alike. This is especially noticeable with Porky and Daffy, whose voices drop several registers between the old and new footage. This almost ruins the visually-smooth transitions.

This isn't necessarily Blanc's fault. Even from the beginning of his career at

Warner, the voices for Porky and Daffy were recorded at a slow speed and played back at a higher speed to give them a higher pitch and a more "cartoony" sound. Without this speeding up, Sylvester the Cat and Daffy Duck have virtually the same voice. Perhaps whoever was in charge of recording the dialogue for this film was either unaware or just didn't care about getting the right sound for these characters. The technique was used for Daffy and Porky's appearances in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and in the film *Blanc* sounded just fine. Other characters with sped-up voices included Tweety, Speedy Gonzales, and Henery Hawk.

Animation-wise, the transitions from new to old footage work very well, which is impressive considering that the classic footage was done at different times by different directors, each with his own style. It's interesting to watch Daffy gradually start to take on a "Robert McKimson" look before segueing into scenes from McKimson's *The Prize Pest*. The new segments vary in length from two to five minutes, and make up about twenty-five to thirty minutes of the picture. (This includes the new short *The Duxorcist*, which is itself another spoof of a dated movie.)

The movie's basic plot concerns Daffy's attempts to save his recently-inherited fortune from the ghost of his late benefactor, J.P. Cubish (established in the opening scenes from the Chuck Jones short *Daffy Dilly*). The greedy, selfish, anything-for-a-buck persona of Daffy established in the cartoons of the late 1950s and early 1960s is pretty much retained here. Cubish's ghost realizes his error in leaving his fortune to

such a selfish duck, and begins to take back his cash by making it vanish bit by bit. Daffy's response is to use what's left to establish a ghost-hunting agency, with the hopes of turning a profit and eliminating Cubish in the process. Daffy employs Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, and Sylvester as assistants, sending them off on various adventures with spooky themes. Classic shorts included are *The Prize Pest*, *Claws for Alarm*, *Transylvania 6-5000*, *Hyde and Go Tweet*, and *Abominable Snow Rabbit*. Also included, as a prologue, is another recent Ford-Lennon production, *Night of the Living Duck*. While this has some amusing moments, it doesn't really go anywhere. Daffy accidentally gets knocked out while reading a monster comic (a la *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery*), and fantasizes himself as a nightclub entertainer to an audience of monsters.

After guzzling a bottle of "Eau de Torme," he sings a song called "Monsters Have Such Interesting Lives" in the real Mel Torme's voice. The character of Daffy in this film resembles a toned-down version of the carefree Bob Clampett character rather than the scheming, selfish Jones/Freleng interpretation. This may be why *Night of the Living Duck* is presented as a separate feature rather than being woven into the *Quackbusters* plot.

Inside Termite Terrace, Volume 3

Bosko Video, \$24.95

The folks at Bosko Video continue their excellent series of early Warner Bros. classics with this tape. Black-and-white cartoons on the tape include *Big Man From the North* (Bosko), *It's Got Me Again*, and *Boom, Boom* (with

Porky and Beans). The last cartoon is a strange attempt at turning a bloody war-time battle into a series of gags (note: this cartoon was made five years before the U.S. entered World War II). Yes, laughs abound as soldiers run for their lives amidst exploding shells, get blasted to pieces, and are turned into cheerful, harp-playing angels. The cartoon climaxes with our heroes Porky and Beans rescuing their captured General and all three winding up in the Military Hospital in body casts. They retain their cheerfulness throughout all this, and as the film ends are laughing it up (in stitches, one might say).

The remaining cartoons on the tape are all in color, and some have already appeared in Turner/MGM compilations. (The tape is copyrighted 1980, before Ted Turner acquired the rights to the MGM library and the Warner cartoons it contains). Cartoons on the tape which haven't appeared on Turner collections include Tex Avery's classic *Hamateur Night* (with Egghead, who also makes a surprise cameo in *Quackbusters*); and *Operation Snafu*, which has Private Snafu doing something right for a change, as he successfully smuggles military secrets out of Japanese Headquarters by dressing up as a geisha girl. This differs from other Snafu cartoons in that it is apparently intended as pure entertainment, rather than as a lesson in military safety.

Other titles on *Inside Termite Terrace, Volume 3* include *Fresh Hare*, *Early Bird Gets the Worm*, *The Sheepish Wolf*, *Flop Goes the Weasel*, and *Jungle Jitters*, all of which contain black stereotypes that were so common in prewar films, both live-action and animated. These cultural antiquities from a less-enlightened era are understandably rarely shown on television, making them highly sought-after collectors' items. (Some other tape collections present the same cartoons for "shock value.")

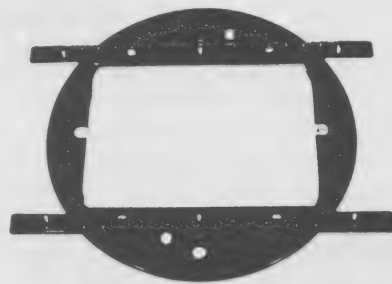
Capping off the volume is a live-action gag film made by the Warner staff of themselves in drag. These films were made for a special "blooper reel" to be shown to employees at Christmas time.

Inside Termite Terrace, Volume 3 is available by mail order from Bosko Video, 3802 East Cudahy Ave., Cudahy, WI 53110. The cost is \$24.95, and the first two volumes (reviewed in last issue's column) are available at the same price. Mention that you heard about the tapes in *Animato*, and postage and handling is free on U.S. orders.

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SHORT SUBJECTS

Laputa: the Castle in the Sky

Directed by Hayao Miyazaki

Akira

Directed by Katsuhiro Otomo

Released by Streamline Pictures

Are you tired of cartoons being musical comedies about dogs? Or stories about mutilating silly rabbits? Or tales about dinosaurs as threatening as rubber duckies?

We know animation is capable of much more than that. And fortunately, the Japanese offer an alternative. As I mentioned in my article in the last issue of *Animato* ("Bringing Japanimation Stateside"), some of these films are coming to American theaters, faithfully dubbed in English.

Laputa: the Castle in the Sky is Hayao Miyazaki's masterpiece, loosely based on an episode from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. A legendary flying castle possesses tremendous power and wealth. This castle is sought by four groups of people – the military, who wish to exploit the power of the stones that levitate the city; Muska of the Secret Police, a historian who knows more than he's telling; the Dola family, a band of sky pirates vying for the treasure; and a feisty boy named Pazu and a girl named Sheeta, who is the unknown heir to the throne of Laputa.

The heroes are Sheeta and Pazu, who act like real kids and not like miniature adults. They eventually team up with Mama Dola's sky pirates, whom I liken to Ma Barker and her boys, who ride the wind in dragonfly-like machines called

"flaptors." Sadly, the English dubbing of the sons' dialogue is poor; they sound like morons instead of rustics (one calls her "Mommy" instead of "Mama," as it is in the Japanese version). And some of the film's dialogue – apparently a literal translation – sounds rather awkward in English. (The same is true of some of *Akira's* dialogue.)

But I can overlook these flaws. The film is well worth seeing, due to its dynamic visuals, hair-raising stunts, gorgeous scenery, and daredevil action in the sky. I found myself gasping as Pazu climbed brick walls and loose vines of a crumbling castle floating several thousand feet above the sea. Neither Bluth's not Disney's recent features provide such breathtaking action (if they try, they fail).

The same can be said for *Akira*, Katsuhiro Otomo's movie based on the popular Japanese comic books which have been translated to English for Marvel's Epic line. This is one of the most intense movies ever made, animated or otherwise. It's crammed with action that never lets up, and it all begins with a nuclear explosion that obliterates Tokyo.

The explosion occurs when scientists were developing a human power source named Akira. It levels the city, and Akira's remains are preserved for future study. Thirty-one years later, the city has been rebuilt as Neo Tokyo, but the citizens are restless and they demand political change. The government still experiments with children to develop their

mental powers. The survivors are a female, Kiyoko, and males Takashi and Masaru. Drugs have stunted their growth; they look like kids, but they're over thirty.

One night Takashi is taken from the hospital by a rebel, but the rebel is gunned down in the streets. Takashi flees, right into the middle of a fight between two street bike gangs. One biker, Tetsuo, inadvertently slams into Takashi. Takashi protects himself with a forcefield, while the impact jars latent telepathic powers within Tetsuo.

The government takes them to the hospital, and analyzes Tetsuo. Meanwhile, Kaneda – the leader of Tetsuo's bike gang – teams up with Kei, a rebel, and they set out to rescue Tetsuo and the others. (Kaneda is voiced by Jimmy Flinders, *Robotech's* Max Sterling and Lancer, Prince Milo in *Warriors of the Wind*, and a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle.)

At the hospital, Tetsuo discovers his superhuman powers and uses them to free himself. Inexplicably, he turns against his would-be rescuers and goes on a destructive rampage through the city. The people rally behind Tetsuo, thinking he's the resurrection of Akira, and they riot against the government. To stop Tetsuo, Kaneda confiscates a laser bazooka, mounts his super-bike, and races to challenge him. The showdown battle is mind-numbing.

Believe me, I've only told you a fraction of the story. It's *that* complex. For once, we have an animated feature



Two scenes from *Akira*.

that asks its viewers to think for themselves.

Akira's appeal comes from its dynamic action, its realistic atmosphere (detailed backgrounds, natural colors and lighting), its effective music (used sparingly for greater impact), and the dramatic angles that look like they've been shot for live-action.

When *Akira* competed in the Annecy Animation Festival in France this June, the Japanese filmmakers wanted the judges to give the movie special consideration because the animators had "passionately" destroyed Tokyo in their work. And so they had. In all the world, no one animates destruction like the Japanese.

Indeed, *Akira's* violence is overwhelming. Decapitated heads. Severed arms. Faces shot in half. A rape attempt. A man riddled by bullets. A mutating monster bulging with blood and guts. A nuclear holocaust.

Care Bears this isn't.

Streamline pictures has had *Laputa* in release since March, playing in select theaters throughout the country. The English-language *Akira* premiered in August at the San Diego Comic Convention, and began making its rounds in December. Check your local movie listings as these movies come your way. The next Streamline release, in the Spring, will be *Lensman – the Movie*.

Bob Miller

The Little Mermaid

Directed by John Musker and Ron Clements; Walt Disney Pictures

When Don Bluth, a decade ago, led a defection of artists from the Disney studios, he gave as his reason his frustration with the kind of animated features the studio was making: episodic, situation comedy-like films with the animation presented in a roughened, no-frills form. Bluth's euphemism for old-fashioned Disney animation was "classical animation," a style that one Bluth studio advertisement defined as "strong characters, vivid colors orchestrated for emotional impact, unusual camera angles, richly detailed backgrounds, and contact shadows under the characters or other special effects." (The ad, being for a Bluth-produced videogame, did not discuss the role of the story in classical animation, but Bluth has often stated his preference for the moralistic tone of the early Disney fairy tales and other stories over those of modern animated films.)

All of which may sound like an introduction to a review of Bluth's new film *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, but is really far more relevant to Walt Disney Pictures' *The Little Mermaid*. Unexpectedly, Disney has made a film which returns to the confident, highly-polished style of the studio's 1950s features, *Cinderella* in particular. When the movie's publicity campaign reminds us that it's Disney's first fairy tale since *Sleeping Beauty*, it summarizes the movie's very successful neo-classicist approach; this is the film Don Bluth has been talking about for years but has never quite made.

Ariel, the young mermaid whose fascination with the world above the sea leads to her falling in love with Prince Eric, is a traditional Disney heroine brought into the 1980s. This girl-bordering-on-womanhood ranks among the best human (or nearly so) characters ever done in animation – even after trading her voice for a set of legs so she can go ashore, her expressive face and body language make her emotions clear. (She is a far more impressive character than the blandly good-natured Prince Eric, who at least has a bit more personality than his counterparts in *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*.)

Ariel has two father figures, and both are among the movie's best creations. Her father proper is Triton, a burly, bearded gent who looks like one of *Fantasia's* gods, but is in his mixture of sternness and tenderness towards his daughter unlike any previous Disney

character. Sebastian, a Jamaican crab who plays paternal Jiminy Cricket to Ariel's Pinocchio, combines amusing voice acting (by Samuel E. Wright) with delightful animation of an inspired character design.

A seagull voiced by Buddy Hackett could be a return to some of the studio's worst celebrity voice-casting excesses of the 1970s, but Scuttle is a genuinely amusing character who serves a valuable narrative purpose as Ariel's would-be expert on the human world. The movie's villainess, Ursula the Sea Witch, appears in the first part of the film only in inserts which are uncomfortably squeezed into the action; once she gets going, in the latter half, this huge, tentacled woman, as muscular as she is fat, dominates every scene she's in (and has in Pat Carroll the perfect voice).

Musker and Clements's storytelling is fast-moving and full of action, as it was in their first feature *The Great Mouse Detective*, which *Mermaid* is a tremendous improvement upon. After a few early scenes whose frantic pace doesn't seem to serve any particular purpose, the film's rapid, fluid (pun unavoidable) storytelling is pleasing and especially appropriate to this underwater tale. While the story itself is simple, the way it's told is clever and richly detailed. In some respects, there's too much detail – a handful of characters, like Ariel's fish friend Flounder, Ursula's henchsharks Flotsam and Jetsam, and Prince Eric's dog, could be excised from the story without any real effect on its logic or entertainment value.

Musker and Clements also do a good job of integrating Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's Broadway-flavored score into the proceedings: that the two most memorable scenes are musical numbers ("Under the Sea," Sebastian's paean to the pleasures of sea life, and Ursula's "Poor Unfortunate Souls") is due as much to the snappy staging as the songs themselves. (By being pleasant and occasionally hummable, the score rises above those of almost all modern Disney features.)

Much of *The Little Mermaid*'s appeal comes from its visual splendor. It's as elaborate and handsome as any animated film done anywhere in many years. (To give Bluth his due, some aspects of the film's look seem inspired by his work, as well as by Japanese animation.) The color styling returns to a richness that the studio had dispensed with starting with *101 Dalmations*, and the back-

grounds are as responsible for the rich flavor as the animation in front of them. A great deal of thought has clearly gone into the film's underwater setting. It's easy to get so caught up in the fantasy that you don't notice the things like the characters' buoyant underwater movements and air bubbles.

Visually, the film's one significant disappointment is that Sebastian really is right: the sea world is much lovelier than what Ariel finds up above. Prince Eric's kingdom is a hodgepodge which mixes aspects of every Disney fairy kingdom from *Snow White*'s to *Sleeping Beauty*'s into one which has none of its own personality. The climax, too, which has Ursula the Sea Witch transforming herself into an even larger, more monstrous form for battle with Prince Eric, is a retread of *Sleeping Beauty*'s finale, and much less striking the second time around.

If *The Little Mermaid* ultimately falls short of being the classic it's already been called, it's because underneath the wonderful artwork and soundtrack is a story that's "Disneyesque" but doesn't quite strike the emotional chords the studio's greatest films did, and still do. (That's no sin: one can say the same of the movie's spiritual sister *Cinderella*.) But coming on the heels of last year's *Oliver & Company* (a vastly different but also well-done film), *Mermaid* suggests that the new generation of Disney artists have most of the skills they'll need to create a classic film someday. When the right story comes along, they'll be ready.

Harry McCracken

Tom and Jerry and Friends: Volume 2
The Adventures of Cubby Bear
Aesop's Fables (1920s): Volume 2
Videotapes of Van Beuren cartoons released by Loonic Video

Van Beuren cartoons were a staple of early TV cartoon shows before Warner and MGM sold their product to TV in the mid-50s. People who grew up watching Aesop's Fables, Farmer Alfalfa, the Little King, Cubby Bear (aka Brownie Bear), the Toonerville Trolley, and the human cartoon stars Tom and Jerry (aka Dick and Larry) will be happy to know that almost 100 of these cartoons from the silent and early sound eras are available from Loonic Video. For those unfamiliar with the rarely-seen Van Beuren cartoons, seeing these tapes should be a fascinating and entertaining experience.

The company began in 1921 as Aesop's Fables Studios. Paul Terry was head of production, and Amadee Van Beuren was the company's president. Their Aesop's Fables cartoons featured animals stars and Famer Alfalfa. Donald Crafton writes in *Before Mickey* that Terry never missed his weekly deadline and that his approach made the company "the most proficient and profitable one of the decade."

The company changed its name in 1928, when Amadee Van Beuren bought a controlling interest by obtaining stock from the main backer, the Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit. In 1929, Terry left and John Foster was appointed as the new head of production. George Stallings replaced him in 1933. From 1933 to 1936, Stallings built up the studio's quality and reputation by hiring

From *The Little Mermaid*. Copyright © 1989 The Walt Disney Company.



young talent including Frank Tashlin as a gag writer, Joe Barbera as a storyman, Burt Gillett and Ted Eshbaugh as directors, and Bill Littlejohn, Peter Burness, I. Klein, Jack Zander, and Shamus Culhane as animators and assistants.

In 1936, at the height of Van Beuren's success as a producer of cartoons for release by RKO, the theater chain announced it had signed a contract to distribute Disney cartoons. RKO had no need for cartoons from two companies, and the last Van Beuren cartoon was released in October, 1936.

Loonic Video's wide selection of Van Beuren cartoons will enhance any animation collector's library and knowledge. Here are details on just a few of them.

Tom and Jerry and Friends: Volume 2 (approximately 50 minutes)

This is a fine tape to start off your rediscovery of the work of the Van Beuren studio. It offers a great deal of variety in humor and style, as it covers work from 1929 to 1933.

Highlights of the tape are *Gypped in Egypt* (1930), with Tom and Jerry; *Dizzy Day* (1930), based on art designed by Otto Soglow of Little King fame; and *Venice Vamp* (1932), with a cat star in an opera spoof. The tape also includes *Jail Breakers*, directed by Paul Terry in 1929, which is a very silly escape/chase film with a cat-and-mouse team as stars. Another short, *Tuning In*, from 1929, shows what happened to Terry's Farmer Alfalfa after Terry left the studio. It is a primitive cartoon and lacks the Terry touch. Terry's talents are more apparent when his films are compared to this crude imitation of his work.

Gypped in Egypt is a classic surreal cartoon. It has a delightful opening with Tom and Jerry in a hammock slung under a camel wandering lost in the desert. The film ends with a great nightmare journey inside Egyptian pyramids complete with mummies and skeletons that come alive. This cartoon is reason enough to buy the tape.

Dizzy Day looks unlike any other cartoon I've seen. The characters and backgrounds are in Soglow's modern art style, and the use of line is outstanding; the work is more stylized than the Little King series that Van Beuren did a few years later. Soglow's offbeat humor is responsible for weird gags involving a soldier named Sentinel Louie. A woman yells for help; the sentinel comes to her rescue, and knocks her out to stop her from yelling! Later, we see a girl

pushing a baby carriage, and then we see that inside it is a bearded old man. Fleischer used a variation on this joke in *Old Man of the Mountain* (1933).

Venice Vamp is delightfully silly. It stars a cat who acts like Cubby Bear and sings a love song to a female hippo in a gondola. The short also has a great gag with a fish, a silly-looking orchestra, and lots of charm.

Another surreal Tom and Jerry cartoon on the tape is *The Haunted Ship* (1930). It has some great gags, and stars several drunken turtles who sing "Sweet Adeline."

There are also two dull cartoons on the tape. *Snowtime* (1930) features singing ice skates, and *Western Whoopee* (1930) appears to be inspired by Disney's *Skeleton Dance* (1929).

Loonic has seven volumes of *Tom and Jerry and Friends*, and if you like the first one you will probably want to buy others.

The Adventures of Cubby Bear (approximately 50 minutes)

This tape contains seven cartoons that star Cubby (who was later known as Brownie Bear in retitled prints). For anyone interested in the development of a character and problems involved in the process, this tape is a must. It features several approaches to directing Cubby.

For collectors who just want to own outstanding cartoons, *Gay Gaucho* (1933), directed by Hugh Harman, is well worth having. The cartoon looks like a Harman-Ising Bosko cartoon, and was made just after the directors left Warner Bros. Cubby dances and sings like Bosko, and the short contains several good gags and rubbery animation that is a joy to watch. The setting and music appear to be Spanish, and the Pegleg Pete-type bandit is named Pedro.

Fiddlin' Fun (1934) is an enjoyable singing musical set in ancient Rome. *Robin Hood Rides Again* features Cubby in another singing musical. *The Last Mail* (1933) is set in the frozen north, and has a fox stealing the mail and Cubby's girl. *Mild Cargo* (aka *Brownie Bucks the Jungle*) has the bear collecting animals in traps. He keeps catching a gorilla who has a crush on him, but apparently the bear has no interest in the gorilla, and keeps trying to get rid of her.

After *Gay Gaucho*, my favorites on the tape are *How's Crops?* (1934, aka *Brownie's Victory Garden*) and *Villain Persued Her* (1934, aka *Sinister Stuff*). In *Crops*, the villain steals plants that Cub-

by is planting in an underground tunnel. Cubby pokes holes in the tunnels ceiling so that the plants will grow above the soil. Very strange. In *Villain*, three caricatures of Jewish lawyers sit and sing on a bicycle built for four. They sit behind the villain as he kidnaps a woman and takes her to a sawmill. It's a funny spoof on melodrama, and it ends with the woman tied to a log while the men fight.

Aesop's Fables (1920's): Volume 2 (approximately 45 minutes)

Loonic has three volumes of the silent-era Aesop's Fables available. They offer a good cross-section of the Terry product from the period, and should be viewed by serious animation buffs who want to learn more about animation history. A good deal can be learned about the evolution of mass-produced cartoons by seeing these early works. You will discover gags that were later used by Disney, Harman-Ising, and others in the sound era.

These tapes of silent cartoons will probably disappoint some people with only a casual interest in animation. They lack the fast-paced humor, interesting artistic direction, and other elements we expect from sound-era cartoons. If you grew up watching them, however, they are bound to bring nostalgic pleasure.

Volume 2 covers Terry's work from *The Wolf and the Crane* (1921) to *Sweet Adeline* (1928). The 1928 film is quite simple. It illustrates a story about a bird doctor who is afraid to come to the aid of a wolf for fear of being eaten. In 1987, Michael Sporn won several awards for a Weston Woods cartoon about a mouse dentist named *Dr. De-Soto* who is afraid to work on a fox for the same reason. Both versions of the tale are entertaining and charming. In contrast to *The Wolf and the Crane*, *Troubles on the Ark* (date unknown) is full of wonderful visuals. Farmer Alfalfa plays Noah, and in one sequence he is disturbed by elephants dancing on the roof. Lots of other silly images appear in the film. A strange gag has the farmer finding land by swimming to the bottom of the sea and pulling out a giant bathtub plug to lower the sea level.

A favorite of mine on the tape is *Venus of Venice* (1926). It opens in a barbershop run by cats. A mouse comes in for a shave... Later in the film, the mouse calls upon his girlfriend. He makes a musical sound, and a musical note appears in the air. He then steps

upon the note to get to her balcony. Harman and Ising used a variation on this gag in their first Warner Bros. cartoon, *Sinking in the Bathtub*. Later, there is a wild, surreal chase through Venice; the mouse's girlfriend has been kidnapped by a cat. Years later, cartoons like this starred Terry's hero Mighty Mouse.

The print quality of tapes from Loonic Video is quite good, and the sound is first-rate. Loonic has added a period music track to the silent-era cartoons that is appropriate and enjoyable. The preprint material on the three tapes reviewed is well above average, and there were few flaws noticed. Print contrast is good, and scratches are very rare. Some of the cartoons have TV titles that replace the original theatrical ones.

Tapes are \$15.95 plus \$2.44 shipping for the first tape (\$1 for each additional tape ordered at the same time). Catalogs are \$1, or free with orders. Add tax if you live in California. Contact Loonic Video, 2022 Taraval St. #6427, CA 94116.

Karl Cohen

The 1989-1990 Saturday Morning animation schedule

I've reviewed Saturday Mornings several times in the pages of *Animato*, and I've almost always found that each season distinguishes itself in some way, either by an unusual trend or an outstanding new program. This year, however, distinguishes itself by not distinguishing itself at all. More on that later.

Due to the nature of television entertainment, each show is rated PLUS, MINUS, or AVERAGE, for shows that are above average, below average, and average. And now, on with the reviews...

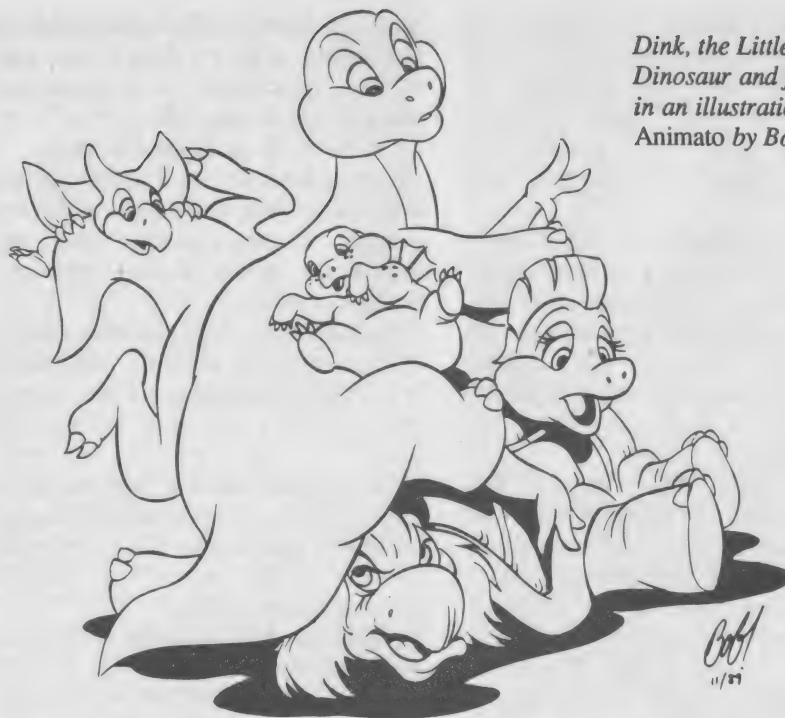
CBS

Dink, the Little Dinosaur

Well, it doesn't take a genius or an expert in paleontology to guess which recent animated feature probably inspired this insipid copy. While not as preachy, neither is this group of tiny dinos very interesting or entertaining. Rating: MINUS.

The California Raisins

Will Vinton's Claymation Quartet makes the transition to standard cel animation – sadly, for the worse. The Claymation special, *Meet the Raisins*, scored



Dink, the Little Dinosaur and friends, in an illustration for Animato by Bob Miller.

laughs with its satirical jabs at the music industry, but this series strives for little more than typical SatAM situational humor (the Raisins in the Big Apple, etc.). The Raisins' Motown covers aren't bad, but their cartoon show doesn't make the charts. Rating: MINUS.

Garfield and Friends

Last year's successful half-hour program featuring Jim Davis' fat cat (along with his "friends" from the now-defunct *US Acres* comic strip) was expanded to an hour for this season. But more isn't necessarily better, and while 30 minutes of the Big Orange Feline was good for a PLUS, 60 minutes spreads the fur and feathers a little thin. Rating: AVERAGE.

Rude Dog and the Dweebs

Rude Dog, the mascot for a line of clothing (what next – *The Adventures of the Munsingwear Penguin?*), is a hip canine who has become the unwilling guardian of a group of homeless, nerdy mutts known as the Dweebs. This series features some of the ugliest character designs I've ever seen for a Saturday Morning TV show. Unfunny and unappealing, the Rude One cops one big MINUS.

NBC

Camp Candy

Once again, an SCTV alumnus makes a stab at a Saturday morning series. Last year it was Martin Short with *The Completely Mental Misadventures of Ed*

Grimley. This year it's John Candy, in animated form, as the administrator of *Camp Candy*. Unfortunately, the results are equally disappointing. NBC should take a cue from CBS's successful *Pee Wee's Playhouse*, and provide talented comedians like Candy with better vehicles than the tired kidvid formulas typified by *Camp Candy*. Who knows – the results could be as innovative and unique as the P-man's Playhouse. Until then, this show gets a MINUS.

Captain N

Popular characters from an assortment of Nintendo video games come to life in yet another lifeless animated series. *Captain N* scores low with a MINUS. GAME OVER.

Karate Kid

Characters from the series of live-action feature films are animated for SatAM. Noriyuki "Pat" Morita reprises his role as Mister Miyagi, karate instructor to young Daniel-san. Along with their friend, Taki, the trio are off on a globe-trotting mission to retrieve a magical shrine that somehow slips beyond their grasp just before the end titles roll. The animation is fair, but the plots are contrived and unoriginal. Rating: MINUS.

ABC

Gummi Bears/Winnie the Pooh Hour

ABC has combined the Disney bruins for 60 minutes of ursine adventure. The *Gummi Bears* stories are repeats of one

of the better Disney TV shows, and *Pooh* is perhaps the best of all of last year's Saturday morning shows. Unfortunately, the newer *Pooh* episodes are sorely lacking in both the writing and animation departments (the animation from Disney's Australian studio doesn't quite measure up to the earlier work by Japan's TMS studio). But the Gummi and Pooh still make for the most entertaining hour on Saturday morning. The denizens of Gummi Glen and the Hundred Acre Wood get the coveted PLUS.

Beetlejuice

"Gross" humor seems to be in this year with the younger set, and who better to supply the slime than the Ghost with the Most, Betelgeuse – er, I mean Beetlejuice! Adapting Tim Burton's black comedy for the cartoon crowd doesn't seem like a natural idea to me, but that didn't stop Nelvana from producing what has to be one of the most bizarre series I've ever seen. Occasionally bordering on the truly tasteless, this show defies both description and rating. I can only suggest that the readers view it once or twice, and decide for themselves...

As you can see, this wasn't one of the better years for Saturday Morning cartoons. Nothing especially bad has appeared. Nothing especially good, either. My guess is that none of the new shows will return next season, with the possible exception of the *California Raisins* (because of their previous popularity), and *Beetlejuice* (because it's, well, so weird). I would encourage the producers and the programming execs to try a little harder next year. Our kids are worth it.

Timothy Fay

The Second Animation Celebration: the Movie

Released by Expanded Entertainment

The latest Expanded Entertainment program of animated shorts from around the world is one of the best. As usual, it's a wonderful way to discover the incredible world of animated films that exists outside of the narrow boundaries of mainstream American animation. Here are a few of the highlights and other films of note:

The longest and best cartoon in the show is Tony Collingwood's *Rarg*, a charming fairy tale about the world inside a sleeping man's dreams that reminds me of Dr. Seuss's works, in both its story and artwork. Collingwood's

sense of humor and drawing style is wonderfully silly, but *Rarg* has an epic feel like few cartoons I've ever seen, and ranks among the best "discoveries" to be found in any of the Expanded shows.

The Marathon is a Russian cartoon that is a product of Glasnost: a Mickey Mouse silhouette cartoon that was shown to Disney studio executives during a visit to the Soviet Union. It's remarkable that the Russian animators captured the spirit of Mickey Mouse so well, and very touching for any Disney fan.

Quinoscopio #2 is made up of a series of Sergio Aragones-like vignettes based on the work of a Cuban cartoonist, which range from shatteringly funny and clever to, well...odd. Like any strong spot-gag cartoon, the good moments are so amusing that the weak ones don't really matter.

Bill Plympton's *25 Ways to Quit Smoking* has the appealing, sketchy art and wild gags of his earlier films, and his work remains a surefire crowd-pleaser. Plympton is beginning to repeat himself, though, and while it doesn't really hurt *Smoking* he might do well to branch off in another direction on his next film.

Two computer animations by John Lasseter are included: last year's Oscar winner *Tin Toy*, and the new *Knickknack*. Both are as hilarious as they are visually amazing. *Knickknack* is actually a better film than *Tin Toy*, and I wouldn't be surprised to see it become Lasseter's third Oscar nominee. (Where

in my opinion it should be competing against *Rarg* and perhaps *The Marathon*.)

A tribute to Boston's Olive Jar studio is made up of commercials and other short pieces that show a great diversity of media and styles on the part of this studio that most of us have never heard of. The selection gets a very enthusiastic audience response, and my appetite is whetted for more Olive Jar work.

John Schnall's *Goodnight Norma...Goodnight Milton* provokes uneasy laughter with its intentionally grotesque, unpleasant story of a couple whose animosity towards each other and the world runs deep under the skin. Schnall is one of those animators whose ideas seem more advanced, at least at this point, than his ability to express them.

The show includes several brief cartoons starring Matt Groening's Simpsons, which are loud, crude, and extremely funny. I'm a little nervous about the upcoming Simpsons TV show. A half-hour of this material, so delightful in small doses, might be hard to take.

When I think back over the *Celebration's* films, I find that the ones that made the biggest impression were the ones that made me laugh (Sorry, *Umbabarauma*; sorry *Fingerdance*). You aren't going to find many funnier animated films than the best ones in this collection. Perhaps the heirs of Chuck Jones and Tex Avery are working in styles of animation and places you'd least expect to find them.

Steve Batory

From *25 Ways to Quit Smoking*. Copyright © 1989 Bill Plympton



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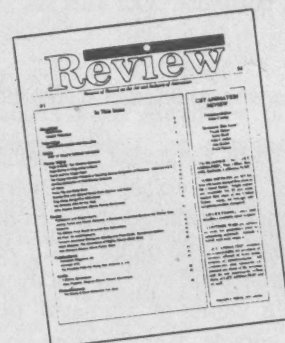
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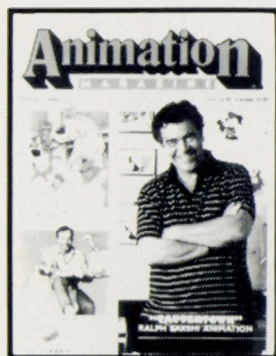
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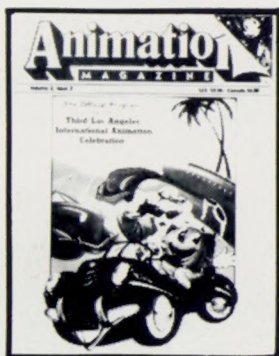
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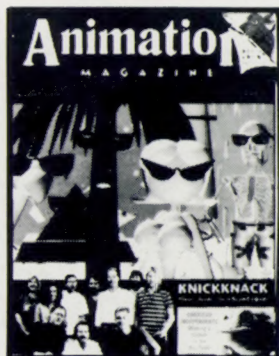
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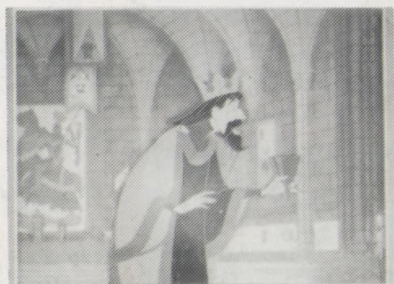
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